

**COMPOSITION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENTS: PROJECT ENGLISH, NEH  
SEMINARS, AND THE NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT**

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2012

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences

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My dissertation assesses Project English (1962-1968), the National Endowment for the Humanities Seminars in Composition and Rhetoric (1973-1987), and the National Writing Project (1974-present) as moments of *productive* engagements with public constituencies. Drawing on personal interviews and archival research, I complicate a disciplinary commonplace: throughout its history, the field has failed to redress public critiques of student writers and writing instruction. The initiatives in my study provide sustainable models for revitalizing disciplinary responses to recurrent public outcries about the failures of literacy education. Among their strategies worthy of emulation are: 1) using rather than resisting public concerns about the real problems of literacy education, 2) promoting a broad definition of literacy to counter public calls to return to “the basics” of writing instruction, 3) forging alliances with elementary and secondary school educators across the curriculum, and 4) framing writing as a bipartisan issue. I argue that composition and rhetoric scholars can enrich the field’s responses to public criticism of our work by drawing on such strategies to build connections with multiple stakeholders across disciplinary and institutional boundaries.

*Composition and Public Engagements: Project English, NEH Seminars, and the National Writing Project* rewrites the field’s history of engagements with multiple publics, especially the federal government, to highlight positive moments in our past that might embolden us to re-imagine possibilities for communicating with public stakeholders in our current moment. In

addition to this historiographic intervention, my dissertation contributes to contemporary conversations about how to ensure that composition and rhetoric scholars are valued participants in public discourse about literacy education. It is crucial that the field sustain productive responses to such conversations because, as my dissertation shows, they not only shape public policy, they inform the field's research agendas and pedagogical commitments. As my analysis of Project English, the NEH Seminars, and the National Writing Project makes evident, literacy education is inescapably both public and political, shaping our curricular choices about what to teach and our pedagogical choices about how.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to have been a graduate student in Pitt's Composition, Literacy, Pedagogy, and Rhetoric program. It is difficult to imagine working with a better group of people, and I thank you all. In particular, I want to acknowledge my committee: Dave Bartholomae, Don Bialostosky, Nick Coles, Jessica Enoch, and Amanda Godley. A committee that consistently provides the right balance of constructive feedback and supportive encouragement is a gift indeed—one I am very thankful to have received. Special acknowledgment is due to Don Bialostosky for pushing me to ask the hard questions. I'm not sure I've arrived at satisfactory answers just yet, but I know I'm asking better questions. I especially want to thank Jess Enoch for the incredible mentorship she has given me throughout this process; it is not an exaggeration to say that I would not have made it through without her support, feedback, and consistent good cheer.

Many people assisted in my research, making the impossible possible in the archives: Ann Marie Mesco, Carnegie Mellon University Archives; Joshua Caster, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Archives and Special Collections; Allen J. Streicker and Kevin B. Leonard, Northwestern University Archives; Shannon Lausch and Lisa Renee Kemplin, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Archives Research Center; Michelle Ghim, National Endowment for the Humanities; Lad Tobin, United States National Archives; and Anne L. Moore, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Special Collections and University Archives. I also need to thank

those who so graciously gave of their time and their memories in allowing me to interview them: Judy Buchanan, Lisa Ede, Elyse Eidman-Aadahl, Janet Kafka, Paul Kameen, Matt McLuskey, William Sipple, Richard Sterling, Sharon Washington, and Richard Young.

Finally, I want to thank my family and friends for supporting me through this crazy ride. My family, for always loving me, even when they must have wondered why I was doing this; Scott Stevens, for being there at the beginning to insist I ask why; Gretchen Coulter, for believing in me when I couldn't; and Steph Ceraso—groaning buddy extraordinaire—for keeping me sane.

*Those of us who have been doomed to read manuscript[s] written in an examination room—whether at a grammar school, a high school, or a college—have found the work of even good scholars disfigured by bad spelling, confusing punctuation, ungrammatical, obscure, ambiguous, or inelegant expressions. Every one who has had much to do with the graduating classes of our best colleges, has known men who could not write a letter describing their own Commencement without making blunders which would disgrace a boy twelve years old.*

~Adams Sherman Hill, “An Answer to the Cry for More English” (1879)

### **1. Engaging Public Rhetorics of Literacy Crises**

Within my first week as a graduate student and teaching assistant, no fewer than three of my professors offered an unsolicited bit of advice: I should never tell anyone that I teach English for a living, much less first-year composition. They warned that disclosing such information would shut down communication because my conversational partner would respond by saying something along the lines of: “Oh, I guess that means I’ll have to watch my grammar.” Certain that my professors’ advice was jaundiced by years of academic cynicism, I laughed off their recommendation. A few weeks later, I introduced myself to a new acquaintance, telling her that I taught a first-year writing class at the local university. Her response? “I guess that means I’ll have to watch my grammar around you.”

This experience—coming at the beginning of my graduate career—has stayed with me as a representative anecdote of the ways that various publics understand composition as a teaching subject. While it can easily be read as a humorous aside or even an “in joke” for composition and rhetoric scholars (certainly, I think the professors who advised me to keep silent about my teaching intended this interpretation), doing so dismisses the not insignificant truth value of the advice. As composition and rhetoric scholars know, from the days of Harvard’s English A class,

composition has been understood a remedial service course designed to bring students' lackluster writing skills up to university and workplace standards.

As the epigraph to this chapter suggests, the teaching of writing is often reduced to basic skills and grammar instruction. Richard Ohmann argues that for nearly a century, the purpose of composition was simply to “train students to speak and write as gentlemen, and it did so by affirming the prestigious language habits of society and discouraging or shaming other habits by ruthlessly applying a few rules of usage and shibboleths of grammar” (167). As the following pages will reveal, when the sociopolitical changes of the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century fractured belief in this singularity of purpose, the public responded with alarm, continuing to circulate this popular (mis)understanding of composition. The field's tendency to view public discourse about literacy education as always hostile, always framed by crisis and remediation, results from this cycle.

Public belief that the teaching of writing should focus on instruction in grammar and usage is based in the conviction that composition functions to: shape and define bourgeois subjects (Crowley), advance individual and national economies (*A Test of Leadership*), and preserve a national linguistic purity (Trimbur). Given that writing instruction is conceived as integral to so many spheres of public life, it is not surprising that public commitments to composition are grounded in these valuations; so, too, are public fears about students' declining literacy skills. For example, in 1961, Joseph Mersand conducted a national survey of *Attitudes Toward English Teaching*. Receiving over 1200 responses from professionals across the business world, Mersand reported public concerns about not only students' declining literacy skills, but also about their moral character and attitude toward writing. As one president of a manufacturing concern wrote, “We feel...that many average and below average students look upon entering

business as a right rather than a privilege and fail to acquire as a matter of course some of the technical skills of expression” (77). Almost 50 years later, the Spellings Commission’s report, *A Test of Leadership*, made very similar charges about students’ declining literacy skills:

“Employers report repeatedly that many new graduates they hire are not prepared to work, lacking the critical thinking, writing and problem-solving skills needed in today’s workplaces”

(3). The discursive similarity across time of public critiques of students’ writing skills thus seems to closely entwine rhetorics of literacy crises with the history of composition and rhetoric.

Our disciplinary history prompts composition and rhetoric to perceive public discourse about writing instruction as dominated by rancorous controversy and incendiary headlines about literacy crises. The field confirms this relationship to the public through its own historical scholarship (see, for example, Crowley, Berlin, Brereton, Soliday, and Trimbur). Most scholars agree that composition has been unsuccessful in addressing and reframing recurrent critiques of writing instruction (Adler-Kassner, Butler, Gallagher, and Hesse). We have failed to address productively public concerns about literacy education because, as Joseph Harris charges,

we have too often retreated behind the walls of our professional consensus, admonishing not only our students and university colleagues but the more general public as well when they fail to defer to our views on language learning—answering their concerns about correctness by telling them, in effect, that they should not want what they are asking us for. (85-86)

As Harris suggests, when the public attacks composition and rhetoric for failing to teach students to write clear, coherent sentences, we all too often respond by suggesting they’re mistaken in thinking the solution is direct grammar instruction.

One example of how the field tends to admonish the public for privileging grammar and basic skills can be seen in James Berlin's response to Rachel Erlanger's 1991 *New York Times* article. Erlanger argued that students' declining writings skills are no doubt due to the fact that "Johnny's Teacher Can't Write Either." Pulling out sample sentences from published articles about the teaching of writing (written by composition and rhetoric teachers), Erlanger contends that these sentences fail to demonstrate the principles of good writing (e.g., clarity, concision, and correctness). "How can people who write like this teach others to write clearly and concisely?," Erlanger questions. "Is it asking too much to expect teachers of writing to heed the rules of rhetoric?" Leading composition and rhetoric scholar, James Berlin, responded in a letter to the editor by taking Erlanger to task for dismissing disciplinary scholarship without first making an attempt to understand it:

The research she dismissed emphasizes composing as an act of critical thinking, value formation and democratic decision making. Students learn to use writing to explore human values in their personal and social experiences. They become active agents in understanding and improving the conditions of their lives, not passive and resentful followers of mindless rules. Grammar and usage become a means, not the end, of effective writing. (22)

Berlin's response illustrates Harris's charge that composition and rhetoric scholars tend to dismiss rather than acknowledge public concerns. Instead of explicating—in terms that would be legible to readers of the *New York Times*—the research that prompted the field to turn away from the current-traditionalism Erlanger advocates, Berlin rejects her suggestion that instruction in grammar and usage is fundamental to the writing class.

As we can see in the exchange between Erlanger and Berlin, public discourse about literacy education invariably focuses on students' declining literacy skills and the need for educational reform, reinforcing a disciplinary commonplace: throughout its history, the public has critiqued composition and rhetoric, and scholars in our field have failed to substantively address or reframe those critiques. With all due respect to this "master narrative" of the frustration and disappointment characterizing disciplinary responses to public discourse about literacy education, I want to offer some different stories about the field's engagement with the public. I do not discount all that the master narrative highlights for us: rhetorics of crisis are mobilizing forces, and have often been leveraged by university faculty and administrators to fund (remedial) writing programs. For example, as Mary Soliday's study of *The Politics of Remediation* examines the open admissions venture (and its legacy) at CUNY, it highlights the institutional politics served by public rhetorics of crisis and remediation. These rhetorics, according to Soliday, are often shaped in the public sector by cultural debates about the uses of education—and play complex roles in defining what a college education is for, the benchmarks we can use to measure it, and who does and should gain access to it. Within the academy, then, literacy crises serve institutional needs by providing the exigence for writing programs to remediate students' declining literacy skills.

At the same time, the heart of this project is to recognize that this master narrative obscures other important details about how the field has communicated fruitfully with various public stakeholders in literacy education. Professional frustration with public perceptions of student writers and writing instruction has a long lineage, one that I will detail in this chapter, revealing a history marked by tension and miscommunication. My dissertation works to

complicate this history by providing a counter-history of three of the discipline's productive relationships with public stakeholders.

My intervention in the discipline's commonplace narrative of failure comes through my assessment of *productive* engagements with public constituencies: Project English, the National Endowment for the Humanities Seminars in Composition and Rhetoric (NEH), and the National Writing Project (NWP). I explore the strategies these projects used to create constructive collaborations between the discipline and public stakeholders in literacy education. I contend that the initiatives in my study provide sustainable models for revitalizing disciplinary responses to public discourse about the failures of literacy education in our current moment. While Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP originated during very different social, political, and educational milieus and were established with significantly different purposes in mind, my analysis reveals that they share certain strategies for opening lines of communication to create productive partnerships with public stakeholders and especially with the federal government, strategies that we can learn from and repurpose for our current rhetorical contexts.

I argue that composition and rhetoric scholars can enrich disciplinary responses to public criticism of our work by drawing on such strategies to build connections with multiple stakeholders across disciplinary and institutional boundaries. In detailing the history of composition and rhetoric's productive engagements with outside constituencies, I hope to embolden the field as it works to discuss writing and student writers with multiple publics. The history that I offer here suggests that it is indeed possible for composition and rhetoric to establish fruitful relationships with public stakeholders: we have done it before, and we can do so again.



Before elaborating on my work in the dissertation, it is important to set out the dominant narrative I want to disrupt. In the following pages, then, I review disciplinary scholarship to uncover how we understand and think about the rhetorics of literacy crises. I then offer some of the canonical stories the field tells itself about how public concerns about student writers and writing instruction have inflected composition and rhetoric's disciplinary development. I explore the most notorious public outcries about writing instruction at the university level: those inflecting our disciplinary beginnings in Harvard's entrance examinations and English A; those concerned with the social turmoil surrounding the Conference on College Composition and Communication's statement on *Students' Right to Their Own Language* and Merrill Sheils' infamous 1975 *Newsweek* article on "Why Johnny Can't Write"; and those feeding the culture wars that framed Linda Brodkey's "Troubles in Texas." All of these moments incurred intense public debate about literacy education at times when the field was developing new theoretical and pedagogical approaches to the teaching of writing. Likewise, all are imbricated within the field's master narrative of frustrated relationship with public constituencies.

### *The Scholarship of Literacy Crises*

Public perceptions of students' substandard literacy skills have led many composition and rhetoric scholars to detail how we understand literacy crises. Such work has uncovered the ideological, material, pedagogical, and political implications of literacy crises, and helped the field gain a more nuanced understanding of public concerns about students' declining literacy skills (Gold; Green; Soliday; Stanley; Varnum). As John Trimbur explains,

[literacy crises] perform certain kinds of ideological work by giving a name to and thereby mastering (rhetorically if not actually) cultural anxieties released by

demographic shifts, changes in the means of production, new relations and conflicts between classes and groups of people, and reconfiguring cultural hegemony. By representing literacy in crisis, the discourse of literacy externalizes these deeper structural changes and shifts in the political balance of power and refigures them in the problem of language and education—of learning how to read and write. (286)

Literacy is always embedded in cultural, economic, and political spheres of the public domain, so it is not surprising that invoking a literacy crisis would perform the kind of ideological work Trimbur describes. Echoing Trimbur, Linda Adler-Kassner and Susanmarie Harrington remind us that public accounts of literacy crises tend to rehearse the same themes: “students aren’t prepared for college or work; this lack of preparation is costing institutions and, directly or indirectly, taxpayers; these problems are rooted in a system that requires outside agents to come repair it” (29). As Adler-Kassner and Harrington show us, public perceptions of literacy crises often link students’ inabilities with economic implications in order to assert the need for education reform, dismissing disciplinary expertise in favor of outside reformers. Clearly, literacy crises—or, more specifically, the rhetorics of literacy crises—signify multiple dimensions of public concerns about the teaching of writing.

Composition scholars studying the rhetorics of literacy crises circulating in public media have done much to unpack the cultural anxieties signified by the terms of crisis. However, such scholarship is aimed at a disciplinary audience—aiding those already “in” composition to think critically about the multiply nuanced implications of public rhetorics of crisis. This work is clearly important in helping the field advance its understanding of public investments in literacy education; it does not, however, work to reshape those investments, to forge alliances between

the discipline and outside stakeholders in literacy education. The danger of this work, then, is that it risks further entrenching the field in an insider/outsider binary, encouraging composition and rhetoric to critique rhetorics of literacy crises rather than to “creat[e] strategies that present alternatives to them,” as Adler-Kassner and Harrington put it (38).

Moreover, as scholars such as Crowley and David Russell have pointed out, the longstanding and contentious nature of public investments in writing and writing instruction has resulted in relatively consistent social and political pressures on the situations of composition. First-year composition is “deeply seated,” according to Crowley, “within cultural and academic expectations about who should have access to higher education,” and those expectations often feed public fears about students’ failing writing skills (229). Similarly, Russell asserts “America has never come to terms with the submerged conflicts that underlie its attitudes and approaches to advanced literacy” (9). Our failure to come to terms with those conflicts keeps writing a central point of contestation amongst multiple stakeholders in literacy education, and repeated iterations of literacy crisis have thus not only shaped public perceptions of writing instruction, but have also inflected the field’s material, political, and pedagogical development.<sup>1</sup>

Complaints about students’ literacy skills continue to circulate inside and outside the academy, usually accompanied by fervent admonitions for teachers to “return to the basics” of writing instruction. The field, however, has deep hesitations towards this most basic and recurrent topoi in the rhetorics of literacy crises: the call to return to basics. Mike Rose labels this dynamic the “myth of transience.” Despite (or perhaps because of) recurrent reports of crisis, Rose argues that “the belief persists in the American university [and in the American public] that if we can just do x or y, the problem will be solved—in five years, ten years, or a generation—and higher education will be able to return to its real work” (562-563). If we just get back to

“basics” in our writing courses, or if we just improve teacher education, or if we just replace first-year composition with two required writing across the curriculum courses—we can solve the literacy crisis.

The field tends to resist public reification of a “return to basics” as the solution to literacy crises because it is, as Jim Corder points out, problematic. The very idea of “basics,” despite its commonsense appeal, is extremely controversial: “much remains to be settled. Many questions remain to be addressed. The questions—and their answers, if any may be found—are crucial to the future not just of the English profession, but also of the citizenry at large” (477). To what basics are we referring when we issue a call to return? To what past moment in which students excelled in “the basics” should we return? These questions are important and deserve thoughtful discussion between those inside and outside the composition classroom; after all, as teachers of writing, we, too, want our students to leave school capable of writing clear and coherent sentences. Recognition of this commonality is, however, often lost when public pressure to return to basics causes the field to entrench itself in opposition behind disciplinary expertise, closing off lines of communication.

Given how frequently our disciplinary scholarship engages questions of literacy crisis, it is worth considering their constitutive features. Robin Varnum argues that there are only three reasons why a literacy crisis may legitimately be said to exist: within a particular educational system, literacy standards must be shown either to have declined relative to a previous era; to be inferior to a standard attained in a different system; or to be lower than what society has come to need and expect (145). These criteria are, however, generally absent from public invocations of literacy crises; instead, generic iterations of literacy crises continually circulate in public discourse about literacy education. The result, as Beth Daniell reminds us, is that “various

narratives of literacy have influenced and continue to shape the images we in composition studies have of who we are, what we do, and how we do it” (394).

These various narratives of literacy crises have accrued over the years, solidifying into a master narrative that shapes the field’s sense of identity in relationship to public discourse about writing instruction. “The very words ‘literacy crisis,’” according to Trimbur, “have become a ritual invocation that justifies our activities and shapes our self-images” (277). The “self-images” shaped by the rhetoric of crisis often depict composition as a misguided, content-less service course, its teachers as English’s ugly stepsisters. The problem with this narrative—as with any master narrative—is that it elides and obscures the particularities of individual stories, particularities that might, in fact, significantly alter how we understand the formative influences of public investments in literacy education.

## **I. The Oft-Told Tales**

As I discussed above, composition and rhetoric tends to pay close attention to a limited set of stories about how public attacks on literacy education have constrained (and sometimes created) the field’s work. In this section, I want to briefly trace those stories of literacy crises, ranging from Harvard’s English A, to the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s (CCCC) policy statement on *Students’ Right to Their Own Language*, to Merrill Shields’ notorious *Newsweek* article on “Why Johnny Can’t Write,” to the public fervor over Linda Brodkey’s proposed “Writing about Difference” class at the University of Texas, Austin. In accounting for these stories, I pay particular attention to the various ways we remember and record how the discipline has interacted with multiple publics (sometimes to productive ends), and to the ways the field understands those engagements as marked by feelings

of frustration and disappointment at being silenced by and disenfranchised from public discourse about literacy education.

*Growing a Field from Harvard's English A*

The history of Harvard's entrance examination in composition—and of its required English A course—is well known in composition and rhetoric, but as one of our origin stories, is worth briefly retelling here.<sup>2</sup> A good place to begin is with Robert Connors' dramatic summary of the formative role a literacy crisis played in universalizing freshman composition:

When more than half of the candidates—the products of America's best preparatory schools—failed the Harvard exams, a great outcry went up.

Trumpeted throughout the nation in newspapers and magazines, “the illiteracy of American boys” became an obsession. College freshman could not write. This situation could not be allowed. Secondary curricula must change. Teachers must be proselytized. Principals must be warned. Schools must be put on notice. (11)

Thus, composition—first the course, then the field—was formed in response to what were perceived as pressing social problems, problems that were publicly heralded through the rhetoric of literacy crisis.

Connors reports that after the Civil War “U.S. culture as a whole became more aware of correct speaking and writing as indices of status and professional worth” (127). One reason for public anxiety over language use is that access to higher education was no longer limited to the upper class, and students were now attending college for reasons other than preparing for the ministry or for teaching (Crowley, Miller). These changes in student demographics, combined with new cultural pressures of professionalization, prompted systemic changes in higher

education. In the midst of this post-war cultural revolution, public discourse “bemoaning the ‘illiteracy of American boys’” lent credence to the belief that “college students could not write...because their early grammar lessons had not ‘taken’” (Connors 129). In 1874, Harvard reacted to the national illiteracy scandal by instituting a writing requirement for their entrance examination. Public anxieties were acute, and, according to Connors, Harvard seized upon the writing requirement as a response to:

A growing awareness of the importance of linguistic class distinctions in the United States; poor showings in written assignments by Harvard undergraduates; a desire to demonstrate that Harvard had the highest education standards and deserved its leadership position in American education; [the need to declare] that henceforward writing would be an important element in the college rhetoric course. (128)

Under the leadership of Adams Sherman Hill, candidates for admission were required to “write a short English Composition, correct in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and expression, the subject to be taken from such works of standard authors as shall be announced from time to time” (*Catalogue for 1873-74* qtd in Brereton 34). The large numbers of students who failed the writing requirement provided Harvard with bragging rights over its rigorous standards. However, as Brereton recounts, “[t]he new examination in English did not reveal some long-hidden weakness so much as supply Harvard with new, objective evidence to use in the effort to improve the secondary schools...” (27). The low quality of student writing on entrance examinations enabled Harvard to lay the blame for students’ illiteracy on the private academies and preparatory schools from which Harvard drew its students (fueling a decades-long feud over composition in the schools).

Most significantly for the future of composition and rhetoric, public outcries about the literacy crisis itself, along with students' dismal performances on the writing exam, allowed Hill in 1885 to redesign a sophomore rhetoric course as a remedial writing course required for all incoming freshmen. This course, English A, was conceived as an attempt to put additional pressure on preparatory schools to improve their composition instruction. As Hill rationalized the course: "Could the study be taken up at the threshold of college life, the schools would be made to feel that their labors in this direction were going to tell upon a pupil's standing in college as well as upon his admission" (qtd in Crowley 72). It is crucial to note that this course was intended to be only temporary—just until the crisis passed—yet it became "the prototype for the required freshman course in composition that within fifteen years would be standard at almost every college in America" (Connors 11). As Freshman Composition solidified into a universally required course, it became inextricably linked with public rhetorics of literacy crises.

### *Changing Student Demographics and Maintaining Linguistic Purity*

A century or so after public anxieties about students' literacy skills prompted Harvard to institute a writing requirement as part of its entrance exams, public discourse again charged literacy crisis, and on very similar grounds—changing student demographics, concerns about linguistic purity, and the desire to improve educational standards. The open admissions movement, beginning in the 1960s, resulted in radically changed student demographics, and these new students—many of whom were deemed underprepared for college work—entered the university with a vast range of literacy skills (Shaughnessy, Soliday, and Stanley). The suddenly urgent need for remedial, or "bonehead," English classes to whip this new student population into shape led to a surfeit of articles published in national journals such as the *New York Times*,



*Newsweek*, and *Time* magazine—all bemoaning that students’ declining literacy skills had created a national crisis.

For example, Edward Fiske remarked on findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress in “Study Cites Student Writing Deficiencies,” reporting that: “13-year-olds and 17-year-olds were using a simpler vocabulary and wrote in a more ‘primer-like’ style with more incoherent paragraphs than their counterparts four years earlier” (26). The result, according to Marvin Stone’s “Bonehead English” and Gene Maeroff’s “Rise in Remedial Work Taxing Colleges,” was an influx of remedial courses at the college level. Meanwhile, Gene Lyons’ *Harper’s Magazine* article entitled “The Higher Illiteracy: On the Prejudice against Teaching College Students to Write” blamed the literacy crisis on college professors, claiming “American students are not learning to write because nobody bothers to teach them how”—all because professors were more interested in the worship of literature than in the teaching of literacy (34).

Fueled by the social movements of the 1960’s and 1970’s—civil rights, affirmative action, feminist consciousness raising, etc.—in concert with open admissions, gave rise to renewed public and disciplinary attention to language policies in the writing classroom. The CCCC 1972 policy on *Students’ Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL)* responded to what Geneva Smitherman characterizes as “a developing crisis in college composition classrooms, a crisis caused by the cultural and linguistic mismatch between higher education and the nontraditional (by virtue of color and class) students who were making their imprint upon the academic landscape for the first time in history” (“CCCC’s Role” 359). Arguing against “the myth of a standard American dialect,” *SRTOL* affirmed students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language, suggesting that teachers needed the experiences and training to respect

linguistic diversity in the classroom and to “uphold the rights of students to their own language” (np).

It is not difficult to see in the debates over *SRTOL* a rehearsal of longstanding public concerns about students’ (in)ability to write clear and concise sentences that follow the rules of standard English. As we saw earlier, such concerns are prominent in all public discourse about literacy education, and are often—as they are here—exacerbated by social and political unrest. A 1974 special issue of *College Composition and Communication* explained to readers that:

American schools and colleges have, in the last decade, been forced to take a stand on a basic educational question: what should the schools do about the language habits of students who come from a wide variety of social, economic, and cultural backgrounds? The question is not new. Differences in language have always existed, and the schools have always wrestled with them, but the social upheavals of the 1960's, and the insistence of submerged minorities on a greater share in American society, have posed the question more insistently and have suggested the need for a shift in emphasis in providing answers. Should the schools try to uphold language variety, or to modify it, or to eradicate it? (1)

The *SRTOL* statement was an attempt to answer this basic educational question about what to do with the influx of students coming into schools with language habits from a variety of social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. Its solution was to disavow the myth of a standard American dialect and insist on respecting students’ linguistic diversity. As a policy statement, the *SRTOL* also publicized this answer to a variety of stakeholders. Indeed, disciplinary efforts to shape public policy regarding language diversity mark some of the field’s most explicit forays into the public domain. *SRTOL* was part of composition and rhetoric’s longstanding concern with

issues of race, class, and language and, as such, is arguably a productive disciplinary response to public concerns about literacy education. Certainly, it has provoked a large body of scholarship investigating these issues.

Of course, the *SRTOL* policy also fueled the literacy crisis fire, provoking increasingly bitter invectives from various stakeholders against composition for not policing “standard” literacies. Smitherman recalls that after its passage:

The fall-out was tremendous. Stringent, vociferous objections were put forth.

There were calls for the resolution to be rescinded and the background document recalled. Some blasted CCCC for abdicating its responsibility and pandering to “wide-eyed” liberals in the field. Others accused CCCC of a “sinister plot” to doom speakers of “divergent” dialects to failure in higher education simply by telling them that their stigmatized language was acceptable. A few simply said that CCCC had done lost they cotton-pickin minds. (362)

And this was just the response within the field. Public discursive activity responding to *SRTOL* was equally critical. For example, a *New York Times* article entitled ““Riting Inglish Real Good,” “bi” J. Mitchell Morse, an English professor at Temple University, strings together a series of error-riddled sentences written by upper-level English majors. Sentences such as: “The blind and the death suffer unjustly because of there handicapped which are considered as being dim witness and are felt to be in a class for the retarded even when there not” are each followed by a recurrent refrain: “Students have a right to their own language, says the Council.” Without providing any analysis, comment, or interpretation other than the CCCC policy statement, Morse juxtaposes student writing with the *SRTOL* statement to construct what is, I imagine, a compelling argument for his readers about what he sees as the “hand writeing on the wall.”

Certainly the sentences—in all their infelicities and errors—appear as indisputable evidence of students’ declining literacy, and of the CCCC’s willful dismissal of a clear need for rigorous instruction in grammar and syntax. While many (though far from all) composition and rhetoric scholars viewed *SRTOL* as a productive pedagogical response to public concerns about the literacy crisis, outside the field the statement was generally perceived as evidence that the field’s liberal political tendencies rode roughshod over its commitment to teaching students to write clearly, concisely, and coherently at the sentence level.

### *Pin the Blame on the Teacher*

Perhaps the most notorious public critique of writing teachers is Merrill Sheils’ caustic *Newsweek* article, “Why Johnny Can’t Write,” which exploded into the national consciousness a few years after *SRTOL*, in December of 1975. In the years since its publication, Sheils’ article has become the field’s ultimate example of public invective about literacy educators, perhaps because “Johnny” encapsulates the narratives of literacy crises against and through which the field has defined itself:

If your children are attending college, chances are that when they graduate they will be unable to write ordinary, expository English with any real degree of structure and lucidity. If they are in high school and planning to attend college, the chances are less than even that they will be able to write English at the minimal college level when they get there. If they are not planning to attend college, their skills in writing English may not even qualify them for secretarial or clerical work. And if they are attending elementary school, they are almost certainly not being given the kind of required reading material, much less writing

instruction that might make it possible for them eventually to write comprehensible English. Willy-nilly, the U.S. educational system is spawning a generation of semiliterates. (58)

Outside the field, “Johnny” represents public concern over academic standards and what is commonly perceived as our nation’s failing educational system. Inside the field, “Johnny” embodies disciplinary anxieties over what is commonly perceived as recurrent and totalizing public attacks against our intellectual expertise and pedagogical practices in the teaching of writing. In both cases, then, “Johnny” symbolizes the point of contestation between differing understandings of what good writing—and good writing instruction—entails. And, as Sheils makes clear, disciplinary perspectives are not the only ones that matter: literacy education will always involve multiple stakeholders.

Sheils’ definition of writing, and what it means to teach writing, revolve around mechanics. She condemns literacy educators for failing to teach students to master written English, concluding, “there have to be some fixed rules, however tedious, if the codes of human communication are to remain decipherable” (65). As we will see throughout this study, her position is akin to that of many journalists, politicians, and pundits who have criticized literacy educators over the years for failing to teach students to write clear, coherent, and correct sentences. From the advent of Harvard’s English A, public “obsession with the mechanics of composition” is one of the “chief legacies” of such reports, according to Varnum (151). Though “Johnny’s” notoriety might suggest otherwise, Sheils’ criticisms are unremarkable in that she is merely rehearsing a common argument about the importance of returning the classroom to the “basics” (e.g., the mechanics) of composition. Like Erlanger’s piece, Sheils’ article relies on a traditional critique of the misguided disciplinary philosophies that prevent educators from

teaching students to write with structure and lucidity, so that “the products of even the best colleges have failed to master the skills of effective written communication” (58).

Sheils reserves the lion’s share of her criticisms for the educational establishment—teachers, in particular—charging that: “even the effects of television might be counteracted if students were required to learn the language in the classroom” (60). Locating “the subtle shift of educational philosophy away from the teaching of expository writing” in the 1960s, Shiels goes on to contend that a number of disciplinary advances contribute to dangerously casual linguistic standards and incompetent instruction in reading and writing (60). First at fault, according to Shiels, is the 1960’s emphasis on “creativity” in the English classroom, because the “creative school discourages insistence on grammar, structure, and style” (60).<sup>3</sup> Next in line as a “major villain” in crimes against literacy education is “the school of ‘structural linguistics’” which asserts spoken language is superior to the written, “and there is no real need for students to study the rules of their language at all” (60). Finally, Sheils concludes by linking the “pervasive influence” of structural linguistics with the political radicalism of the 1960s, indicting the CCCC’s policy on *SRTOL* for supporting the notion that insisting on standard English “constitutes an act of repression by the white middle class” (61). The disciplinary advances Sheils cites as causal factors in the literacy crisis frequently appear in public discourse about failing literacy education; so, too, does the reductive and dismissive treatment she gives to disciplinary theories about literacy and literacy education.

### *Publics Inside and Outside the Ivory Tower*

In 1990, as the Director of Lower-Division English at the University of Texas, Austin, Linda Brodkey (in consultation with other instructors) designed a staff syllabus for graduate

student instructors teaching the required first-year composition course. As Brodkey explains, the class, “English 306: Writing about Difference,” focused on postmodern conceptions of language and difference, particularly in terms of the role “language plays in fabricating realities that use received definitions of difference to explain inequitable social, political, or economic treatment of particular groups or classes of people as arising out of or justified by inherent differences among people” (142). The syllabus called for students to study argumentation by reading and writing about legal opinions in Supreme Court cases relating to race and gender, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Education Amendment of 1972, and the Bill of Rights.

Brodkey’s proposed course may seem unremarkable when viewed alongside the numerous composition courses themed around political topics such as civic engagement or world Englishes that are currently taught at many universities. At the time, however, it caused considerable controversy within her department, her university, and even across the country. Charges of crisis issued forth because many viewed the class as an attempt to indoctrinate students with leftist political ideologies. As Richard Bernstein, one of Brodkey’s most prominent critics, warned in a *New York Times* article, the course “in” multiculturalism was designed less to teach writing skills than to promote “the rising hegemony of the politically correct” (np). Similarly, faculty from across UT Austin’s campus signed “A Statement of Academic Concern” which accused Brodkey of “subordinating instruction in writing to the discussion of social issues, and, potentially, to the advancement of specific political positions” (qtd in Skinnel 146). The public outcry over Brodkey’s “Writing about Difference” raged across the pages of the university, regional, and national newspapers, culminating in the dean’s unilateral decision to postpone (e.g., cancel) the course.

Brodkey's "troubles in Texas," as she characterizes them in *Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only*, are situated within a broad context of incendiary debates about literacy instruction. The debates over English 306 in particular were, as Mary Boland notes, "situated within the larger culture and canon wars of the early 1990s generally, and also participated locally in specific heated arguments about curricular responses to racism" (36). The course's cancellation is well documented within composition both by Brodkey and by other scholars, likely because of the unsettled nexus of political and pedagogical concerns illustrated by Brodkey's "troubles."

Indeed, Brodkey's experience has assumed an almost iconic status within the field—a symbol of right-wing attacks (which began inside her own department) against what is seen as composition and rhetoric's politicization of what should be a course in basic writing skills. It is not surprising that Brodkey's troubles are so well known across the field, as her experience exemplifies the worst sort of horror story, the kind to strike fear in the hearts of any compositionist versed in academe: her expertise as a writing scholar and teacher was so devalued that she was denied academic and pedagogical freedom. But, of course, her story is terrifying to the extent that it is not singular; Brodkey's experience is but one in a long line of fraught discursive exchanges between composition and public stakeholders in literacy education, exchanges that are consequential to policy decisions at both local and national levels.<sup>4</sup>

Brodkey's war with public critics is significant, to be certain, both in the way it was waged and in its outcome; yet it is important that, in the wake of that impact, we not gloss over its particularities in favor of asserting her battle as incontrovertible evidence of how public attacks can curtail composition and rhetoric's intellectual and pedagogical autonomy. The field tends to privilege Brodkey's troubles as the ultimate bad end to which we can fall when under



public attack. I do not disagree with that assessment, but I also do not think the moral of the story is quite so simple. Most importantly, how might the outcomes of situations such as Brodkey's change if the field acknowledged public concerns as valid and worthy of discussion? This question becomes especially important when we remember that what is often left out when scholars rehearse Brodkey's story is that the "public" involved in the debates is not easily delineated.

Brodkey's first opponents included colleagues from across UT Austin's professoriate; in fact, among her most vociferous critics were Alan Gribben, a fellow English faculty member, and Maxine Hairston and John Ruszkiewicz, Brodkey's composition colleagues (and, ironically, authors of the *Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers* her syllabus required). This was not a civil debate conducted between academics and the general public—it was a no-holds barred fight that began between right and left factions inside the academy, but soon spilled out of the ivory tower into public venues, with supporters and opponents coming from both locations. In short, this was not a clear case of "us" against "them," but rather a battle of permeable allegiances across disciplinary, departmental, institutional, and public boundaries that complicate binary constructions of *the* discipline against *the* public.

## **II. Understanding Disciplinary Responses to Public Accounts of Literacy Crises**

Virginia Anderson summarizes Brodkey's struggle as "one of the most visible debacles in the history of composition's relations with outside audiences," claiming that it raises some fundamental questions about how the field engages public concerns (447).

On what authority can we base our claims to particular territories, and what dilemmas arise when we make such claims? In particular, what must be our

relationship with what we have deemed “outside?” Why do we make such demarcations, and must they result in blindness, silences, and severed relations? Or are there other, possibly more productive ways to conduct relations across property lines and the concomitant inside/outside split? (447)

The fundamental questions Anderson raises in response to Brodkey’s experience point to the problems of failing to productively and proactively engage public stakeholders in discussions of literacy education. Why do we tend to dismiss public concerns about writing instruction, resisting incursions across the demarcations of our disciplinary boundaries?

Disciplinary conversations addressing the issues Anderson raises about the field’s relationship with “outsiders” push us to ask two fundamental questions: 1) how might composition and rhetoric establish a credible public presence to create and sustain productive engagements with multiple stakeholders in literacy education? and 2) how might attending to previous positive relationships between the discipline and public stakeholders embolden us to seek out opportunities to engage the public?

Composition and rhetoric scholars rarely are given access to public forums in which they can communicate disciplinary knowledge and expertise to the nation. However, public intellectuals such as Stanley Fish regularly comment on the field’s misguided theories of writing pedagogy, proffering alternative pedagogical approaches—usually calling for strict attention to grammar and usage—that will “solve” the national problem of (failed) writing instruction.<sup>5</sup> For example, Fish’s 2005 *New York Times* opinion piece opened with the provocative claim that most high school and college graduates are “utterly unable to write a clear and coherent English sentence” (A17). The problem, according to Fish, is that most composition classes emphasize “content rather than form, on the theory that if you chew over big ideas long enough, the ability

to write about them will (mysteriously) follow.” Lest his readers remain in doubt about Fish’s opinion, he proclaims that: “[t]he theory is wrong. Content is a lure and a delusion, and it should be banished from the classroom. Form is the way” (A17). Fish’s scriptural assertion that “form” is the one true way for teachers to lead their students on the path to higher literacy skills is enticing in its very simplicity: return to the sentence.<sup>6</sup> Fish’s inflammatory complaints about—and remedial prescriptions for—composition’s wrong-headed theories of writing instruction draw ire from the disciplinary community with each new commentary. Yet, despite vociferous responses from disciplinary experts, Fish continues to captivate a large public audience with his dramatic exhortations about composition’s emphasis on content and its allegiance to the cult of self-expression.

Fish’s ill informed characterizations of composition theory—inflammatory rhetoric and all—are representative of the numerous critiques circulating in public spheres.<sup>7</sup> It is not difficult to understand why such critiques enjoy so much attention, appealing as they do to the high value the public places on literacy and the commonsense notion to return to basic, fundamental building blocks of grammar and usage. The more difficult question is not why such critiques are so frequently published, but why the field has been unsuccessful in publishing counter narratives to engage and reframe the critiques of Fish and his ilk. Conservative pundits outside the field regularly conduct public discussions about literacy education, while composition scholars and teachers struggle to gain a credible voice in the conversations. Why, as Paul Butler asks, have writers like Fish—and *not* composition scholars—become the primary discussants speaking for the field in the public sphere (392)?

According to Butler, composition scholars have failed to establish a public presence due to a dearth of public intellectuals. We do not have a Fish, capturing the public’s ear by speaking

to matters of public concern. As Butler points out, “we have not addressed those topics the public cares most deeply about” (394). As the long litanies of narratives of crisis indicate, public audiences are most concerned about declining literacy standards and the possible salvation to be found in returning to the basics of grammar and usage. Given the long history of public attacks on the composition and rhetoric, it is hardly surprising that the field does not have its own public intellectuals. Who would want to build a career embroiled in public discussions, always arguing against impeachments of disciplinary perspectives on grammar and usage? Given what seems to be an obvious scarcity of disciplinary experts willing to sacrifice themselves on the altar of public intellectualism, I want to amend Butler’s solution. I agree that developing public intellectuals to speak for composition from the inside is a worthy endeavor, however, I am not convinced it is the only (or necessarily the best) way to address—and reshape—those topics in which the public is most deeply invested when it comes to literacy education.

### **III. Composition’s Productive Public Engagements**

Laboring through a long history of public attacks on composition, it is not surprising that the field collectively bristles at new iterations of complaint. Retreating to the safety of professional consensus is an understandable response; however, it also limits possibilities for engaging public stakeholders in dialogue about literacy education—listening to their views and sharing ours. In the following chapters, I turn to three underexplored moments in our disciplinary history, moments in which composition and rhetoric secured public support for the teaching and learning of writing. Project English, the National Endowment for the Humanities seminars, and the National Writing Project are each substantive pedagogical projects, federally funded and supported by stakeholders within and outside the discipline. In analyzing the rhetorical strategies

by which these projects gained federal support, I am interested in complicating our master narrative of disciplinary failures to articulate our work in persuasive terms for the multiple constituencies concerned about literacy education in this country.

### *Project English, 1962-1968*

In response to public concerns about the post-Sputnik educational crisis, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the United States Office of Education (USOE) collaboratively developed Project English, a research initiative in the teaching and learning of English. The NCTE and USOE leveraged public concerns about the crisis in education to frame its own literacy crisis in need of federal support. Project English is today largely forgotten in our disciplinary histories; when it is remembered, it is primarily in relation to its Curriculum Study Centers, which developed curricula for teaching literature, language, and composition at all grade levels. However, Project English can also be read as a productive response to crisis that supported a range of research activities, including conferences, seminars, and individual research studies devoted to identifying needed research in the teaching and learning of English. J.N. Hook, NCTE's first executive secretary and the first coordinator for Project English, described its overarching research agenda as: 1) answering as many as possible of the big unanswered questions concerning the teaching of English; 2) finding ways of increasing the knowledge and competence of current English teachers; 3) improving teacher preparation programs; and 4) organizing a better system for disseminating new research findings ("The First Year 33-34).

In Chapter 2, I recover Project English, drawing on archival research I conducted at the United States National Archives, the National Council of Teachers of English archives, as well as at the Carnegie Mellon University and University of Nebraska archives. In reading the archive

of primary materials relating to the creation and implementation of Project English, I am interested in its strategies for engaging public constituencies in supporting the teaching and learning of writing. How did Project English teachers and researchers create collaborative, constructive engagements across disciplinary lines? How did Project English advocates leverage public concerns about the post-Sputnik educational crisis to cultivate support for literacy education in a time when public focus was primarily on science and technology? How did they educate political leaders to speak on our behalf? How did these engagements not only facilitate productive dialogue between the discipline and public stakeholders, but also create opportunities for the field to advance its knowledge and expertise? In short, what might we learn from Project English regarding how to enrich public debates about literacy education in our current moment?

*National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminars, 1973-1987*

In the late 1960s, public attention drifted away from the sciences and toward the humanities, recognizing the need to support the knowledge making endeavors of both. Humanistic scholars asserted a crisis in the humanities in order to secure federal authorization to establish the NEH. Less than ten years after the NEH was created, its Summer Seminars for College and University Teachers paved the way for a pivotal era in composition and rhetoric's disciplinary development. Between 1973 and 1987, the NEH sponsored dozens of seminars in composition and rhetoric, enabling hundreds of university faculty, many of whom held doctoral degrees in literature, to study with leading intellectuals in the emerging field. In the midst of the literacy crisis of the 1970s, literary scholars often accepted jobs teaching in and administering writing programs, and the seminars afforded them the opportunity to gain expertise in emerging areas of disciplinary scholarship. The list of seminar leaders and participants includes a number

of people who have since become important figures within the field; as such, the seminars are today widely recognized as foundational to the nascent discipline. Despite this widely accepted recognition of the seminars' critical importance to composition and rhetoric's disciplinary history, very little has been written about the seminars.<sup>8</sup> My research in this area thus fills a rather large gap in the literature, but my interest in recovering the seminars is not simply because of their intellectual importance to the field: the seminars are also a site of productive engagement between the discipline and the public.

In Chapter 3, I explore how seminar leaders took advantage of opportunities created by the NEH to advance the discipline's scholarship. In funding these seminars, the NEH became a public stakeholder in literacy education, and it set out its own guidelines for how the seminars were to be conducted and what they were intended to accomplish in terms of improving teaching and learning in the humanities. I am interested, then, in how the NEH policies functioned as enabling constraints for composition and rhetoric scholars to develop seminars that initiated so many teachers into the field's intellectual commitments and pedagogical practices. Drawing on archival research from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the United States National Archives, as well as personal interviews I conducted with Richard Young (who led a number of important seminars), Lisa Ede, Paul Kameen, and Bill Sipple (each of whom participated in a seminar), I consider how composition and rhetoric scholars made use of the NEH guidelines for their own purposes, while simultaneously speaking back to the Endowment, educating it about critical areas of disciplinary growth and expertise. How did seminar leaders articulate their intellectual interests in ways that would be legible to the NEH, even though composition was not explicitly recognized as part of the humanities? How did seminar leaders communicate with the NEH to educate them about the growing field and the importance of

educating teachers of writing *about* writing and rhetoric? What kinds of lasting effects did the seminars have on participants, in enabling them to speak with confidence about writing, student writers, and what it means to teach writing?

### *The National Writing Project, 1974-present*

In 1974, responding to the reported literacy crisis of the early '70s, James Gray launched the Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP). The BAWP was an innovative educational reform project, bringing together university faculty and K-12 teachers to work collaboratively to improve the teaching of writing across the curriculum and at all grade levels. The BAWP's strategies for forging alliances between university faculty and K-12 teachers to address the literacy crisis worked to great effect. Today, nearly 40 years later, what is now known as the National Writing Project (NWP) continues to create lines of communication between educators of all levels and public stakeholders in literacy education. The NWP is a national network serving all fifty states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Their mission is to build deep public understanding of literacy education through focusing on "the knowledge, expertise, and leadership of our nation's educators on sustained efforts to improve writing and learning for all learners" (NWP website). In fulfilling that mission, the NWP supports its teachers in making their practice public, to become advocates for the NWP's core philosophies about the teaching and learning of writing.

In Chapter 4, I draw on interviews I conducted with four NWP national directors, to explore the project's history of addressing popular perceptions of literacy education through its emphasis on helping teachers make their teaching practices public. NWP teachers learn to speak to multiple stakeholders about the value of and best practices for a rich literacy education, thus



providing a constructive model for composition and rhetoric as the field works to reframe public perceptions of student writers and writing instruction. I am interested, then, in the strategies and practices the BAWP used to productively respond to the reported literacy crisis of the early 1970s. What strategies did the BAWP use to address public concerns about teachers' inadequacies and students' declining literacy skills, and how did it open lines of communication across multiple constituencies? How did the BAWP persuasively articulate its beliefs about writing and writing instruction to various stakeholders, and how does the NWP do so today? How has it leveraged its fundamental philosophies about writing, teaching, and learning to build partnerships with teachers, administrators, school districts, universities, foundations, and the federal government?

### *Reflections on Lessons (to be) Learned*

Despite their differences, recovering these three initiatives provides historical models for the work we *can* and *need* to do now in engaging the public in the teaching and learning of writing. Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP are diverse pedagogical initiatives, involving different constituencies in improving the teaching and learning of writing. Moreover, they operated within very different political, cultural, and educational milieus to serve their individual missions. Juxtaposing these projects against the timeline of composition and rhetoric's disciplinary development clarifies some of these differences. Following Stephen North in locating the field's disciplinary origins in 1963 (with the Dartmouth Conference and the publication of Richard Lloyd Braddock's *Research in Written Composition*), Project English came into being just prior to the field, and one of its primary aims was to conduct needed research in the teaching and learning of English, especially composition.

Just over a decade later, composition and rhetoric was more widely recognized as a field, with the emergence of graduate programs and disciplinary journals (Goggin), and the NEH seminars functioned to help a generation of literary scholars retool their intellectual commitments to join the new field. A significantly larger project than the others in both scope and duration, the NWP is the first professional development project to upend traditional academic hierarchies and bring university faculty and K-12 teachers together as collaborators in improving literacy education; it is also the only project to take public advocacy as an explicit part of its mission. Despite these differences, however, the three projects share some core strategies for building bridges with multiple publics, and I argue that we can learn from these strategies to revitalize disciplinary responses to public discourse about literacy education in our current moment.

In Chapter 5, I move from my analysis of these three initiatives to theorizing how this history enables us to see composition and rhetoric productively engaging public discourse about writing, student writers, and writing instruction today. Policy and research reports from federal institutions such as the U.S. Department of Education and the College Board's National Commission on Writing evidence some of the important ways that public discourse about literacy education both creates and constrains the situations of composition in our current moment. Instead of perceiving public concerns about literacy education as misguided fears to be resisted or denied, I conclude by showing how recognizing past moments of productive disciplinary engagements with the public enables us to see how scholars today are opening lines of communication with multiple publics to secure support for the teaching and learning of writing. Synthesizing the implications of Project English, the NEH Seminars, and the NWP for our current moment, I consider possible avenues by which we might draw on these (historical)

models to productively engage public policy, lest our work be severely curtailed by instrumental conceptions of writing, and renewed calls for a “return to basics” in writing instruction.

#### **IV. A Coda on Publics**

One of the challenges involved in studying composition and rhetoric’s disciplinary responses to public complaints of literacy crises is to define the various publics—and the kinds of public discourse—invested in literacy education. As Michael Warner’s study of *Publics and Counterpublics* reminds us, defining a public or even publics, is difficult work.

People do not always distinguish even between *the* public and *a* public, though in certain contexts the difference can matter a great deal. *The* public is a kind of social totality. Its most common sense is that of the people in general. It might be the people organized as a nation, the commonwealth, the city, the state, or some other community. It might be very general, as in Christendom or humanity. But in each case, the public, as a people, is thought to include everyone within the field in question. This sense of totality is brought out by speaking of *the* public, even though to speak of a national public implies that others exist; there must be as many publics as politics, but whenever one is addressed as *the* public, the others are assumed not to matter. (65-66)

On the one hand, literacy education in this country assumes investments from a general or national public; everyone is a stakeholder because literacy—the “field in question”—is fundamental to students’ and citizens’ academic, professional, personal, and civic lives. On the other hand, as Warner suggests, this view of *the* public becomes more complicated in the context of literacy education, which, as I will discuss in each of my chapters, is valued (and contested)

by multiple, fluid publics that are differently constituted depending on the situation. For example, government officials constitute one public in their official capacity, and another in their roles as parents or professionals with non-governmental careers. Similarly, composition and rhetoric scholars may speak from their position as academic experts, or they might speak as public stakeholders outside academe from their positions as community members or social activists.

One reason it is so difficult to define the public or publics invested in literacy education is because literacy is important to “everyone.” According to Anne Ruggles Gere, because literacy is deemed crucial to the “general public,” the phrase “‘teaching writing’ achieved keyword status in public discourse about education during the early history of this country and remains a key term today” (264). We agree that literacy is vitally important to personal and civic health; we do not agree, however, on the specific contributions literacy offers, or on what it means to teach writing. The “we” in the previous sentence is, of course, fraught by permeable boundaries, signifying not only those “inside” composition and rhetoric, but also the multiple publics “outside” the field. Further complicating the “we,” as I indicated above, is the fact that the insider/outsider binary is itself fluid, as all stakeholders occupy multiple subject positions, holding various commitments to literacy education.

In my study of Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP, the publics involved are differently defined and play different roles in each of these projects. As we will see in my analysis of Project English, two publics are invested in discourse about the post-Sputnik educational crisis that circulated across the nation, capturing the public imagination by exhorting the need to reclaim the United States’ position as a global superpower. The first might be defined as the general public (or at least the public reading national press coverage about the educational

crisis Sputnik made visible); the second is the federal government, which stands in as a public stakeholder in literacy education through Congress' function as a representative of the American people.

The publics involved in the NEH seminars were more elite publics than in Project English, as debates about humanistic study tended to involve those who were either academically involved in the humanities, or who were philanthropically involved in financially supporting the humanities as they contributed to the nation's cultural health. I treat the NEH itself, a government foundation, as a public stakeholder in literacy education because in funding summer seminars it was accountable to the federal government and the public it represents in terms of how—and on what—it spent federal dollars. It is important to remember that the NEH is a government institution created as a public endowment to support humanistic study in America's classrooms and to make the humanities accessible to the American people.

Finally, as we will see in my analysis of the NWP, multiple publics ranging from California residents to school districts to university administrators were involved in the creation of the Bay Area Writing Project (the NWP's direct predecessor). Concerns about California's literacy crisis circulated in the state's newspapers, provoking collaboration between the publics listed above to support the Bay Area Writing Project. As the writing project spread across the country, more institutional and state publics became involved until finally the federal government stepped in to authorize direct funding for the NWP.

For the purposes of providing some parameters for this study, then, I am primarily interested in disciplinary engagements with the federal government as a public stakeholder in literacy education. All three of my case studies forged alliances with the government to fund pedagogical initiatives aimed at improving the teaching and learning of writing—though, as we

will see, to build these bridges with the government, all three projects strategically worked to open lines of communication between literacy educators of all grade levels. In referring to public discourse, I am looking primarily at media coverage of student writers and writing instruction in national newspapers and magazines. In my final chapter, I expand these definitions as I consider what we can learn from these projects' strategies to respond productively to public concerns about literacy education in our current moment—a moment in which public discourse filtered through the rapid communication of social media and the blogosphere means that publics are increasingly fluid and permeable.

*If the teaching of English is to be improved throughout the country, bold and immediate action must be undertaken on a national scale.... The basic problems of improving the preparation of teachers and of articulating the study at all levels of education are so important and so large that they can be undertaken only by a nationally supported program.*

~National Council of Teachers of English (1961)

## **2. Productive Partnerships: In the National Interest Project English, 1962-1968**

Project English, a federally sponsored research initiative, grew out of the post-Sputnik education crisis of the 1960s. The Russian satellite was proof that the United States had lost its scientific superiority, and it pushed the nation into an era of intense debate about educational deficiencies across the curriculum. Public attention—and funding—was directed toward perceived crises in those areas deemed indispensable to national defense: mathematics, science, technology, and foreign languages. This “national soul-searching” over the crisis in education, as Wm. Stanley Hoole characterized it, leveled attacks on elementary and secondary schools, colleges and universities (53). Reforming education was a critical priority.

Fervent public debates over how the nation might reclaim its superpower status at first dismissed English as tangential to educational excellence in the pursuit of national defense. As the opening epigraph to this chapter indicates, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) challenged this dismissal, recognizing that English was imperiled by its exclusion from national conversations about education. In response to being excluded from public discourse about education reform, the NCTE lobbied for national leadership in addressing problems inherent to the teaching and learning of English. Their campaign attempted to broaden the nation’s educational focus by building on the already available public rhetorics of crisis, defense,

and excellence to draw attention to English as a “cornerstone” discipline. Project English was born of these strategic efforts.

While Project English is today remembered primarily for its Curriculum Study Centers, it supported a range of collaborative, constructive research activities, including conferences and seminars devoted to identifying needed research in the teaching and learning of English, as well as basic and applied research studies. In taking up this research, the Curriculum Study Centers “were to be the counterparts of the highly successful curriculum projects in science and mathematics. They were to engage in research, develop new curricula, field-test the new courses of study, then disseminate the results and so benefit English teaching throughout the nation” (Kitzhaber 137). Lofty goals, to be sure, yet over the course of six years, Project English sponsored more than twenty Curriculum Study Centers at universities across the country, facilitating collaboration between university faculty and K-12 teachers in developing, field testing, and assessing literature, language, and composition curricula. Through these Curriculum Study Centers, Project English researchers and teachers continued to strategically engage public concerns about literacy education, drawing on and reframing the limited conceptions of education made available by rhetorics of crisis, national defense, and educational excellence.

In recovering and exploring Project English, I am interested in its rhetorical strategies for engaging public constituencies in supporting the teaching and learning of writing. How did Project English teachers and researchers create collaborative, constructive engagements, forging alliances across disciplinary lines in order to cultivate public support? How did they educate political leaders to speak on our behalf? How did these engagements not only facilitate productive dialogue between the discipline and public stakeholders, but also create opportunities



for the field to advance its knowledge and expertise? What might we learn from Project English regarding how to enrich public debates about literacy education in our current moment?

To address these questions, I begin my analysis of Project English by contextualizing it within the social and political concerns that swept the country during the post-war years, calling for educational reform in the wake of global tensions epitomized by the Sputnik crisis and pedagogical inefficiencies such as “Life-Adjustment” education. Many of the called-for educational reforms during this era grew out of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958; indeed, Project English is often mistakenly remembered as an activity sponsored by the NDEA, but it did not begin as such (it was not until the 1964 amendments that Project English gained NDEA funding). Nonetheless, the historical slippage between Project English and the NDEA is significant as the latter framed so much of the public discussion about education. Accordingly, I study Project English within the context of the post-Sputnik educational crisis and the NDEA, which together at first ignored English as a field of interest. I then analyze the NCTE’s efforts during this era of education reform to draw national attention to the critical stakes of improving English teaching and learning. I read these strategies with and against those used during the Departments of Labor and Health, Education, and Welfare appropriations hearings for Public Law 83-531, through which Project English first secured funding. Identifying how their rhetorical approaches both supported and resisted popular topoi of crisis, national defense and educational excellence, I consider the ways in which they garnered attention toward English at a time when public focus was on the sciences. I conclude by reflecting on what Project English can teach us about forging alliances with multiple publics in our current moment.

## **I. Setting the Stage for a New Crisis in (English) Education**

Project English is remembered today as one of the post-Sputnik educational reforms funded through the NDEA. Historicizing Project English through these key terms is not inaccurate, but it does fail to account for the crisis of the life-adjustment model of education that pre-dated Sputnik by a number of years, and the coordinated efforts of English educators and professional organizations to respond to that crisis—both of which are important to understanding Project English’s rhetorics of negotiation. As a model of productive collaboration between the federal government and English teachers, scholars, and researchers, Project English administrators and researchers engaged public topoi of crisis and excellence in literacy education in order to forward their own terms of value. Before turning to Project English’s beginnings, then, I want to briefly trace the educational challenges that set the stage for the Sputnik crisis.

The post-World War II years changed the American landscape in multiple ways, not the least of which was a renewed commitment to education as a vehicle for national economic and political prosperity. A relatively “placid period of the ‘return to normalcy’ between the economic and political turmoil of a great world war and the worldwide social revolution of the 1960s” (Masters 5), the post-war years saw dramatic changes in almost all aspects of American life, including education. As record numbers of nontraditional students enrolled in college through the GI bill, both higher education and writing instruction simultaneously became “big business” and more populist (Connors 204). Maureen Daly Goggin describes the social, cultural, economic, and technical forces of the post-war years as exerting transformative pressures on higher education, redefining both literate practices and the role of education (38). As America moved toward the information age, knowledge became increasingly specialized, a differentiation that raised expectations for workers’ literacy skills. For the first time, a college degree was thought of

as a necessity—perhaps even a right—for American citizens, and with the proliferation of white-collar jobs and the explosion of knowledge work in the years immediately after the war, new pressures were brought to bear on higher education (Russell).

As Thomas Masters notes of the pressures on higher education during the post-war years, “the nation needed academically literate people not only to provide the basis of a satisfying, orderly, economically productive society, but also to build a bulwark of rationality against a return of the madness that had run rampant in the world [during World War II and into the Cold War]” (152). However, even as the college-educated “corporate ideal” was becoming characteristic of American industry, educators were concerned to meet the needs of the secondary students who would not go on to college (Guttek 259). In 1945, the U.S. Office of Education’s Division of Vocational Education met to discuss the educational needs of those secondary students whose needs were not met by college preparatory programs. The conference report indicates that as many as 60% of the nation’s secondary students were at need for “life-adjustment training.” (Applebee; Ravitch). What came to be known as the “Life-Adjustment” model grew out of 20<sup>th</sup> century progressivism as one response to these new educational challenges: in seeking to serve those students who were not college-bound, the life-adjustment model of education, in both name and in practice, emphasized “the personal and social needs of adolescence” rather than the “subject-oriented demands of college” (Applebee 146).<sup>9</sup>

While the life-adjustment model spread across the curriculum, it had a particular impact on English, as it crowded out subject or content matter in favor of addressing students’ personal, social, emotional, economic, and vocational needs. One College Entrance Examination Board report described the problem with English education as one wherein “Macbeth vies with the writing of thank-you notes for time in the curriculum, and lessons on telephoning with

instruction in the processes of argument” (*Freedom* 3). English as life-adjustment became a hodgepodge course, stripped of content knowledge and no longer centered on disciplinary study. As Albert Kitzhaber commented, English was “not so much a curriculum as a receptacle” (“What is English?” 5).

Professional responses to the life-adjustment crisis in English education took a variety of forms, but they all sought to redress the lack of focus in English by forwarding some definitional premises for what students should learn (and in what sequence) across their education. One major response was the Conference on the Basic Issues in the Teaching of English, which took as its project an investigation into the basic issues confronting the field in the teaching of English.<sup>10</sup> Part of the work in articulating these basic issues was to arrive at “a definition of what English is as a subject in the schools, and an argument for the sequential nature of it—based on a core of experience, a body of knowledge, and a set of specific skills to be attained by the student from elementary school to graduate school” (“Articulated Program” 13). The hope was that articulating these unsettled problems—or basic issues—would “lead to a critical re-examination of the whole field and possible solutions of far-reaching importance” (“Basic Issues” 2). The “re-examination,” it was hoped, would redress the pedagogical incoherencies propagated through the life-adjustment movement.

A later response, this time from the College Entrance Examination Board, was the 1965 publication of *Freedom and Discipline*, the report of a five-year study, representing “what the Commission believes to be a consensus among teachers of English on the essential characteristics of the subject” (vii). Like the Basic Issues Conference, *Freedom and Discipline* tried to address the deficiencies of life-adjustment education by setting forth some basic frameworks for defining the subject of English, and making recommendations for teacher

education. Written to an audience of professionals and the “informed public,” *Freedom and Discipline* offered recommendations in the hopes that they will “help clarify thinking about the problems to which teachers of English in secondary schools and colleges must address themselves” (16). Like the Basic Issues conference, *Freedom and Discipline* sought to strengthen the boundaries of English as a content subject in response to the lack of intellectual rigor afforded by life-adjustment education.

Ultimately, the urgent demand for a literate work force and rationally minded citizens was at least partially responsible for the growing public backlash of criticism against life-adjustment education. The profession was not alone in its concern for the status of English teaching and learning in the United States. Contemporary critics linked the life-adjustment curriculum to Deweyan progressivism; however, as scholars such as Peter Dow have since demonstrated, the former differed substantially from the latter in that it replaced Dewey’s emphasis on critical thinking with an emphasis on developing practical or vocational skills (Dow 15). Conservative critics also leveraged attacks against the nation’s historic commitment to a populist education, arguing that in order to meet the challenges of global competition, America “must discard [the] system of equal educational opportunity for all students in favor of a differentiated approach that offered special training to the academically talented” (Dow 12). The massive outpouring of criticism—stemming from a variety of sources—was effective, especially as it was coupled with a significant shortage of teachers, the onset of the baby boom, and the schools’ appeal for federal aid. Critics of life-adjustment education made clear that the nation was facing a crisis of education that it could not ignore. At this pivotal moment of great debate over the nation’s educational needs, a new crisis provided a rallying point.

## **II. Sputnik, National Defense, and the Pursuit of Excellence**

On October 4, 1957, at the height of the cold war, the Soviet Union launched the Sputnik satellite into space. The Soviet's unanticipated demonstration of scientific prowess shook America's belief in its technological superiority, catalyzing unprecedented national investments in education. According to Hoole, within a month of Sputnik's ascent, America's entire education system was under attack from all angles (52). Public concern mounted over what were seen as deplorably lax educational standards, and many critics blamed inferior schooling for the United States' failure to keep ahead of Russian scientists (Dow, Masters). Belief that the Cold War would be won in the classrooms provoked national debate over the best way to resolve the crisis in education. President of Columbia University, Grayson Kirk, summed up the nation's alarm, stating: "throughout the country the subject of education has moved out of the quiet classroom into the arena of bitter controversy" (qtd in Hoole 53). The federal government moved quickly to fund educational reform efforts aimed at reestablishing the United States as the dominant actor on the world stage: less than a year later, on September 2, 1958, President Eisenhower signed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) into law.

The NDEA, also known as Public Law 85-864, marked a striking change in government response to education—a change that the English profession was quick to capitalize on. As one of the few successful federal education bills, the NDEA invested millions of dollars in improving the teaching and learning of subjects deemed indispensable to national defense: science, mathematics, technology, foreign languages, etc. English and the humanities were not initially included in NDEA funding, an "oversight" that the NCTE joined forces with the United States Office of Education (USOE) to redress, ultimately succeeding in garnering a small amount of Congressional funding for Project English. Given that the NDEA did not initially include

provisions for English, the passage of the original legislation is of lesser importance to Project English than are the 1961 hearings to amend and extend the bill. Nonetheless, the ambiguous language of the provisions it did include, and the topoi of crisis, national defense, and educational excellence that served as commonplaces in its passage, were both critical to the NCTE and the United States Office of Education's (USOE) suasive activities. By leveraging these aspects of the NDEA discourse, the NCTE—working in concert with the USOE—was able to intervene in post-Sputnik debates, garnering attention for public support of research in English studies.

Prior to the NDEA, the nation's historic distrust of centralized education prevented the passage of the few education bills to be introduced, as even education-minded legislators were reluctant to challenge public opinion on the government's role in education. Longstanding public concerns to maintain autonomy at the local level had—time and again—prevented the successful passage of federal legislation for education. Many Americans opposed a strong federal role in education over concerns about the strings that might be attached. For instance, that federal involvement might lead to mandated racial desegregation in the schools or that it might breach the traditional separation between church and state (Gutek 259). Congressional reluctance to challenge prevailing views on government encroachment in education was so strong that Representative Carl Elliott, one of the coauthors of the NDEA, commented that “[i]n every session of Congress from 1949 to 1958, I brought up some form of a student aid act, knowing that I'd get nowhere for awhile, knowing it might be years before my bill would get a hearing.” He later commented that any proposed federal education law was likely to be killed “by a politically paranoid version of the three R's: Race, Religion, and the Reds” (qtd in Urban 47).

Sputnik, widely seen as a symbol of crisis, thus provided an opportunity to overcome traditional opposition to federal aid to education through bipartisan support of initiatives such as the NDEA.

It is no wonder, then, that in her article entitled “Eisenhower and Federal Aid to Higher Education” Janet Kerr-Tener notes that President Eisenhower advised NDEA proponents to articulate its contributions to national defense in order to ensure its swift passage. According to Kerr-Tener, a 1957 United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) task force was working on a bill for federal aid to college students—long before Sputnik was launched. According to HEW officials, “the news of the October Sputnik launch ‘literally gave [the HEW task force] a rocket to hitch [its] aspirations to’” (qtd in Kerr-Tener 475). While the original proposal did not focus on science education—the HEW director preferring instead to “encourage excellence across the board” (475), Eisenhower pushed the task force to present the bill for bipartisan support by emphasizing science and national defense. He advised that any legislation “you can hook on the defense situation [will] get by [Congress]” (478). The president’s savvy mandate to focus the bill on science education and national defense recognized Congressional desire to appease public fears about the United States’ competitiveness on the world stage, a desire that was strong enough to overcome Congress’s traditional reticence to participate in nationalized education reform efforts.

The NDEA was designed “to strengthen the national defense and to encourage and assist in the expansion and the improvement of educational programs to meet critical national needs” through provisions for a number of wide ranging educational efforts directed toward students, teachers, and educational institutions (*NDEA* 23).<sup>11</sup> Title I clarifies the scope and function of the general provisions of the NDEA, stating that



Congress hereby finds and declares that the security of the nation requires the fullest development of the mental resources and the technical skills of its young men and women. The present emergency demands that additional and more adequate educational opportunities be made available. The defense of this nation depends upon the mastery of modern techniques developed from complex scientific principles. It depends as well upon the discovery and development of new principles, new techniques, and new knowledge. (24)

In response to the crisis in American education that Sputnik made visible, the NDEA tightly yokes scientific and technological advancement with national defense. However, as Wayne Urban notes, the NDEA does not specify or describe the “present emergency” to which the bill is addressed.

The open-ended language of the “present emergency” described in the general provisions carries over into Title III, which provided “financial assistance for strengthening science, mathematics, and modern foreign language instruction” (*NDEA* 31). Exactly how such instruction is to be “strengthened” is not articulated, likely in order to preserve states’ and local school districts’ curricular control. The language in Title VI is similarly non-descript, legislating simply that the government might contract with institutions of higher education to establish and develop centers for teaching modern foreign languages, and to fund teacher institutes for advanced training in the teaching of foreign languages in elementary or secondary schools (*NDEA* 6). Critically absent from the bill is a list specifying the modern foreign languages to be taught; the bill instead simply notes that instruction is to be offered in those languages “needed by the Federal Government, or by business, industry, or education,” without indicating any criteria for measuring “need” (*NDEA* 36).

Given our long history of public controversies over the government's role in education, at least one of the NDEA's originating authors, Lister Hill, believed that general federal aid (rather than for a specified purpose) was the only desirable, and the only possible, successful outcome (Urban 16). It seems likely that the NDEA language, while harnessed to the imperative for national defense, is intentionally non-descript so as to circumvent another legislative failure. Regardless of the motivating factors behind the NDEA language, its open-ended nature afforded opportunities for English educators to push for reform—opportunities that the NCTE, and, later, Project English, seized upon as productive points of entry into the national conversation on education.

#### *NCTE and The National Interest*

One reason for the success of the NCTE's efforts to secure federal funding for Project English was its sustained rhetorical competence in acknowledging and reframing the topoi of crisis, national defense, and educational excellence that were so prevalent in public discussions of education. The NCTE acknowledged the pragmatic and very real public concerns about the connection between education and national defense. In doing so, however, it also worked to reframe conceptions of these topoi by pointing out that a durable national defense would not be established solely through scientific excellence; instead, the NCTE argued that national defense might better be achieved by *also* instilling students with the critical and imaginative thinking, and informed communication skills gained through humanistic study—*not* through the social skills lessons of life-adjustment education.

In 1960, stung by English's exclusion from NDEA funding, the NCTE passed a three-part resolution calling for aggressive pursuit of federal recognition of the importance of

strengthening the teaching and learning of English. The NCTE argued that English faced serious failures, including the curricular incoherencies of life-adjustment English and a shortage of adequately prepared teachers. Leveraging NDEA rhetorics of crisis, defense, and excellence was an expedient way of arguing for national leadership to address those failures. English deserved a piece of the federal funding pie. It was resolved that the NCTE

1. Support all national efforts to obtain support for the teaching of English and the other humanities on a national scale; and
2. Direct its Executive Committee to inform the nation's leaders in government, business, and education of the Council's mounting concern over the neglect of English and the other humanities in current educational efforts; and furthermore
3. Direct its Executive Committee to inform the Congress of the United States and the United States Office of Education of the compelling need for an extension of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 to include English and the humanities as a vital first step toward improving instruction in English and of stimulating program development in this important area. (*National Interest*, np)

The resolution prompted the formation of an ad hoc committee on the National Interest, which quickly compiled an eponymously titled short book on the urgent need for national action to improve the teaching and learning of English at all grade levels.<sup>12</sup>

*The National Interest* drew on NDEA topoi of crisis, defense, and excellence to frame an educational crisis in English. It does so by describing a widespread problem with English teaching and learning through a “direct and shrewd presentation of the importance of English to the national welfare” (Applebee 199). Following a fairly conservative script for the centrality of English—and especially literature—in the attainment of “full human dignity,” the report speaks

to the concerns of national defense raised in the NDEA (15). Science, mathematics, and technology are indispensable to national defense, but they are not sufficient. Indeed, English studies enhance scientific and technological advances because “[o]ur democratic institutions depend upon intelligent, informed communication, which in turn depends upon the training of all persons to think critically and imaginatively, to express themselves clearly, and to read with understanding” (*National Interest* 16). Accordingly, *The National Interest* argues that secure defense cannot be achieved absent English’s humanistic tradition.

As part of the NCTE’s ongoing effort to generate publicity and improve English’s professional standing, *The National Interest* adopted a rhetoric of failure, highlighting numerous “instructional inadequacies” in the teaching and learning of English across the country (Applebee 199). Such inadequacies ranged from a critical dearth of English teachers who were, in fact, trained in their subject, to an incoherent life-adjustment curriculum that failed to provide rigorous and sequential instruction in the core concerns of English: language, literature, and composition. Drawing on a number of studies on the status of English teaching across the nation, *The National Interest* claimed a “deep-seated national awareness that the improvement of the quality of English teaching will depend on major changes in the conditions under which English is taught” (27-28). *The National Interest* responded to these post-Sputnik concerns about educational crisis by framing its own crisis in English—arguing for more teachers, better teacher education, improved teaching conditions, and sustained research in the teaching and learning of English.<sup>13</sup>

While emphasizing professional failures seems a counterintuitive strategy for gaining support, the NCTE’s approach succeeded, likely because these “failures” spoke to larger concerns of educational crisis raised through the NDEA: English’s failures echoed educational

failures across the curriculum, especially in the sciences. However, even as the NCTE capitalized on the reform energies generated by the NDEA, it also worked to resist the limited conceptions of education privileged by the NDEA's topoi of crisis, defense, and excellence. Project English advocates acknowledged the validity of Congressional concerns about the crisis in education and the connection between national defense and educational excellence, but they also resisted those same conceptions by pushing for new ways of thinking about (and responding to) them.

In concert with publications such as *Freedom and Discipline* and reports of the Basic Issues Conference I discussed previously, *The National Interest* drew on popular rhetorics of crisis to paint an alarming picture of English education across the country. Not only had the life-adjustment model “ignored the growth of the literary imagination and removed most of the content of English from the English classroom” (Shugrue 21), but a critical dearth of adequately prepared teachers in the classroom—and of teacher education programs for future educators—meant that a growing population of students was receiving insufficient instruction in a subject vital to national health and prosperity. As such, exactly as NCTE had hoped, *The National Interest's* “rhetoric of failure” succeeded in drawing public attention to the problems of literacy education. In addition to sales totaling around 10,000 copies, the book was distributed to members of Congress, to USOE officials, to state education departments, and to key media figures. It was also reprinted—in full—in the *Congressional Record* (Long Way 195). Ultimately, *The National Interest* spurred sufficient public interest in the state of English education to warrant discussion about funding English in the first amendments to the NDEA.

*Leveraging Topoi of Crisis, Defense, and Excellence*

The Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare convened a special Subcommittee on Education on May 12-13, 1961, to hear testimony on extending and amending the NDEA.<sup>14</sup> Capitalizing on discussion generated by *The National Interest*, Sterling McMurrin, Commissioner of Education in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), and Harold Allen, NCTE president, testified in these congressional hearings on “the value of English to national educational reform” (Strain 518).<sup>15</sup> The first witness called before the subcommittee, McMurrin provided a succinct summary of accomplishments under the NDEA before recommending amendments to Titles 2-10 of the original legislation. While his oral arguments to fund English are scant, in commenting on Title VI (the Language Development Program), he did take advantage of the original title’s ambiguous language to endorse adding provisions for English to the existing support for language institutes and teacher training programs in modern foreign languages, suggesting that the emphasis on modern foreign languages (languages that, as you will recall, were conveniently unspecified in the original title) be broadened to include English because of “the crucial position of English as a keystone of the entire learning process” (*Hearings Before the Subcommittee of Education* 24).<sup>16</sup>

In his full prepared statement (which was written into the record), McMurrin elaborated on the “crucial position of English,” arguing that

a democracy such as ours cannot function without an informed and articulate people; and for us to live in a condition of liberty presupposes a widely developed ability to think clearly and to write and read with proficiency. Moreover, the developments arising from the growing technology, and the challenge to our leadership of the free world, have placed a premium on informed communication

and on the individual's capacity to develop ideas with clarity, precision, and understanding. Finally, the process of education is conducted through language, and the quality of education is dependent on the effectiveness with which language is used. (64)

McMurrin advocates an instrumental conception of English, with his emphasis on clarity and precision—and his savvy appeal to the “premium on informed communication” warranted by “the challenge to our leadership of the free world” invokes the “present crisis” to which the NDEA was addressed. Of course, the “crisis” was nearly four years past by this point, and perhaps his implied reference was meant to remind his listeners of that fact. Whether McMurrin intended it or not, several committee members responded—then and throughout the hearings—by questioning the connection between education and national defense.

Pennsylvania Senator Joseph Clark affirmed his support for amending the NDEA to fund provisions for English, lamenting that

I have been concerned ever since the National Defense Act was passed...that we were led astray by a rather, to my way of thinking, phony connection between aid to education and national defense. My lay connection with education would lead me to feel that it was extremely wise, in the interest of promoting a higher standard of civilization, to give whatever aid was desirable at the Federal Government level across the board. Sure, we need help in the natural and physical sciences, we need help in the social sciences, too. Goodness knows we need help in the humanities...

I realize that in order to get a bill through, it probably is necessary to pay meek adoration to the national defense concept in this thing...From where I sit, we need

a lot more people competent in English. We may need some more musicians and poets and philosophers, just as much as we need people to advance scientific achievement.... (*Hearings Before the Subcommittee of Education* 84-85)

In reading the congressional record, I find that Clark's skepticism over supporting education for its proposed role in national defense, introduced on the first day of the hearings, set a precedent for further deliberation. Throughout the remaining proceedings, committee members and witnesses continued to discuss whether the proposed NDEA extensions and amendments should be considered in light of national defense or national health. Some discussants found linking education to defense an appropriate response to the "present crisis," suggesting education as a solution to pressing national problems; others argued against yoking education and defense, claiming that education should be framed as a long-term investment in national health rather than as an antidote to emergency needs.<sup>17</sup> I want to mark this concern over the appropriate exigence for educational funding because it likely fertilized the ground for Harold Allen's broader testimony later in the hearings about the necessity of including provisions for English in the NDEA amendments.

The following day, Harold Allen, NCTE president, came before the committee to express the council's grave concern over the "inadequacies facing English teaching in the Nation's schools," and belief that only strong national leadership and support would be effective in remediating those inadequacies (*Hearings Before the Subcommittee of Education* 371). Allen then submitted a six-page summary of *The National Interest* into the records.<sup>18</sup> The summary reiterates McMurrin's argument about the need for a literate citizenry, claiming that "the very existence of our society depends upon an informed and literate public, upon citizens who can evaluate what they read and hear, citizens who can think straight and express their convictions



clearly and effectively, citizens who can distinguish between the tawdry and the worthwhile” (*Hearings Before the Subcommittee of Education* 371). Allen does not explicitly locate his argument for funding English in issues of national defense, though his gesture toward the “very existence of our society” clearly echoes the tacit connection McMurrin draws.

Where Allen’s testimony differs from McMurrin’s, perhaps because of the former’s disciplinary commitments to English, is in his insistence on literacy as an evaluative tool for critical and creative thinking. Describing the function of English beyond teaching students the tools for clear and precise communication is an important distinction because it affords Allen’s argument for improved teacher education and teaching conditions. If, as Allen contends, English “introduces students to a cultivated understanding of themselves and other human beings,” and if English is currently “less well taught than it could be or should be,” then the wide-ranging federal support of the kind Allen calls for seems warranted. In addition to supporting McMurrin’s request for amending Title VI to include support for English along with modern foreign languages, Allen recommends a Title III amendment to include support for mathematics, science, foreign languages, English and English as a foreign language; a Title II amendment allowing students to receive loans and fellowships to support English study; and new provisions for funding schools’ library development programs.<sup>19</sup>

In the Senate hearings, Allen’s testimony received general statements of support from multiple members of the committee. A month later, in the House hearings, Allen’s testimony—wherein he essentially repeated his earlier statement—the response was somewhat more contentious. U.S. Representative Charles E. Goodell, member of both the Committee on Education and Labor and the Special Subcommittee on Education, stated that although he supported the inclusion of language and composition, he had grave concerns about funding

literature through provisions for English. “I understand,” he explains, “that the English teachers have generally interpreted this bill as opening up Federal funds for the entire subject we know of as English, as it is taught in our public schools. I consider this bill...as merely pointing to English as a language” (*Hearings before the Joint Subcommittee on Education* 759). He goes on to clarify that he accepts the vital need to improve the teaching and learning of English across the country—but in the interest of national defense, Goodell stipulates that English be more narrowly defined “as a language, as a subject, as a tool” (759). Questioning Allen about the possibility of separating—and specifying—the teaching of language and composition from the teaching of literature, Goodell returns to crisis and defense, arguing that literature, like history and social studies, was left out of the original legislation because it was not “one of the special areas in which we needed a spur in this country for national defense purposes” (759).

Indulging in a subtle bit of character assassination, Goodell tells Allen that “my little channels in the world of English teachers makes me believe that a good many of them are kind of chortling about the fact that they are going to have federal funds now for their entire subject matter” (759). Allen does not take Goodell’s bait, responding to his provocation with a simple statement about his belief that the amendment should not bar literature. Despite Goodell’s continued push to limit funding to the teaching of the English language and to the teaching of composition (the latter to explicitly exclude composition on poetry or literature), Allen, a linguist, indicates for the record that he does not agree with Goodell’s analysis. However, he does go so far as to acknowledge that language and composition are in greater need. Throughout Goodell’s questioning of Allen, none of the other committee members interject with their own questions or concerns; it is not clear, then, the extent to which Goodell was speaking on behalf of his colleagues. As soon as Allen articulates his discomfort with the idea of stripping literature

from the amendment, the chairman dismisses him from the witness stand. Again, it is not clear whether the chairman was seeking to end Goodell's line of questioning or to curtail Allen's defense of literature.

Despite Goodell's concern about funding English absent a literature exclusion, the records of both House and Senate hearings indicate strong support for the amendments proposed by both McMurrin and Allen. Based on the textual evidence, it is difficult to determine why English was stripped from the extensions and amendments that President Kennedy signed into law several months later. An undated but clearly contemporaneous NCTE memo on the "National Interest Project" contains a brief discussion of the legislative outlook, indicating that while English stood a good chance of being included in the amendments, it was not a foregone conclusion—especially as one result of the hearings was a "realignment of the influence and political power that various Senators and Representatives hold over their fellows. Some formerly influential representatives no longer seem to be highly regarded" (1). The report does not indicate which Senators and Representatives had fallen out of favor (or why), but it is entirely likely that Goodell was not alone in his concern that English—especially as *The National Interest* defined its literature, language, and composition components—posed a challenge to the pragmatic functions of the NDEA. As I noted earlier, while Goodell concedes the importance of language and composition, he does so because he recognizes "language in its oral and written forms as rhetoric—a 'tool' (or *techne* in classical terms), applicable to any discipline" (Strain 521). Subordinating language and composition to literary ends would not serve the same instrumental ends, a fact that almost certainly did not escape those House and Senate members who found the NDEA's rhetorics of crisis and defense persuasive.

### III. Project English and Defining the Field

Though its attempts to include English in the first extension of the NDEA failed (it was not until the 1964 amendment that English was allowed), the NCTE did build communicative bridges with the federal government to secure monies for improving the teaching and learning of English: Project English.<sup>20</sup> The NCTE's efforts with *The National Interest* generated enough attention within the USOE to convince its officers that sponsoring "research and experimentation in the area of English instruction" was of vital importance ("Project English" 2). In response, an ad hoc task group directed from the office of the Commissioner of Education, Sterling McMurrin, developed a proposal for an initiative we now know as Project English (Clark 1). Public Law 83-531, first passed in 1954, and administered by the USOE's Cooperative Research Branch, permitted the Commissioner of Education "to enter into 'cooperative arrangements' with colleges, universities and state educational institutions for the purposes of research, surveys and demonstrations" (Donlan 6). An early USOE statement announced:

Through the application of a small amount of federal funds and of the professional resources of the office at strategic points, the project seeks to complement systematically the existing efforts of various groups already contributing significantly to the same objective, thus multiplying the impact of such efforts. In consultation with these groups, the office will sponsor an increasing amount of research and experimentation in the area of English instruction. Specifically, it will contract with universities for the establishment of centers to develop curriculum materials and methods, will provide for dissemination of new knowledge, materials, and other resources for the improvement of instruction, and will otherwise seek to facilitate the growth of a

vigorous quest for quality in English on the part of our schools and colleges.

(“Facts”)<sup>21</sup>

These cooperative arrangements with universities thus provided an initial structure for Project English to conduct the constructive, collaborative research in the teaching and learning of English the NCTE called for through its work on *The National Interest*.

### *Strategic Parameters*

McMurrin requested Congressional authorization for Project English at the House of Representatives appropriation hearings for the Departments of Labor and Health, Education, and Welfare in April of 1961. His testimony in the appropriations hearings evidences two key suasive strategies for securing support. First, McMurrin echoed the NCTE’s appropriation of public rhetorics of crisis, defense, and excellence by arguing for the vital importance of humanistic education in cultivating a strong citizenry. Second, he set careful parameters around his proposal; that is, he delimited Project English *as a project*, rather than requesting funding for English studies writ large.

In framing his proposal for *Project English*, McMurrin drew on *The National Interest* to assert the importance of education in cultivating moral citizens of high intellectual and creative power:

It is one thing to achieve a high level of scientific knowledge and technological competence in a society that lives by regimentation and is moved by totalitarian ends. It is quite another thing, and vastly more difficult to achieve and maintain leadership in that knowledge and competence and at the same time acquire the humane knowledge, the social intelligence, and the devotion to the public good

and character that are essential to the meaning and character of an essentially democratic society. This is the present and future task of American Education—beyond question the largest social task that has ever faced any nation. (*Hearings before the Subcommittee* 328)

In insisting that scientific knowledge and technical competence in a democratic society depend on a more fundamental humane knowledge, McMurrin broadened the narrow conceptions of crisis and defense that circulated in discussions about the NDEA. The “crisis,” in McMurrin’s testimony, is not one of technological failure, but of falling short in providing humanistic study to prepare students to be critical, creative, and engaged citizens. As he puts it, “sooner or later, we are going to have to recognize that the real problem of American defense is tied up with the whole strength of our culture” (*Hearings before the Subcommittee* 359). “Defense” is not about reclaiming superpower status, but about educating students capable of cultivating national health.

Having complicated the limited conceptions of education made visible through the NDEA’s topoi of crisis, defense, and excellence, McMurrin deployed his second suasive strategy. In contrast to NDEA funding, which would have authorized monies for English writ large, McMurrin delimits his request by locating it in a specific *project*: he requests funding through Public Law 83-531 for Project English, a “special project” of “high priority.” Arguing for this “special project” on behalf of the USOE, McMurrin explains that “we are convinced that a more adequate instruction in the schools of *reading and in the written and oral usage of the English language* is a matter of utmost importance among our national needs” (*Hearings before the Subcommittee* 330, italics mine). McMurrin’s careful delineation of Project English as a project that would focus on reading and writing not only sets parameters around his request, it

also leverages a strategic appropriation of the concerns about disciplinary definitions forwarded by *The National Interest*.

The crisis in English that the NCTE framed for its public readers is in many ways a crisis of definition. NCTE leaders contended that English instruction lacked a core focus, with teachers required to follow a curriculum that covered anything from Hamlet to personal hygiene to telephone etiquette. In short, *The National Interest* argues that English lacked a coherent curriculum: “the singular thing about the study of English is that it is a fusion of many elements.... it is only a hodgepodge” (26). The solution, according to *The National Interest*, was to solidify English’s disciplinary boundaries by defining the field as the study of language, literature, and composition.

Defining English’s disciplinary boundaries was likely to hold little interest for a crisis and defense-minded Congress, however. Accordingly, instead of requesting general provisions for English, McMurrin restricted his aims for Project English to research aimed at improving the teaching of reading and the written and oral usage of the English language. As McMurrin’s statement makes clear, the parameters and requested funding for Project English were fairly limited and utilitarian in nature. This was not an endeavor aimed at reifying English as the elite study of aesthetics; it was a project intended to improve students’ reading, writing, and speaking skills. In other words, McMurrin requested funding for a specific *project*—not for *English*—a certain selling point for Congressional leaders concerned about funding humanistic study irrelevant to national defense.

McMurrin set additional project parameters around his proposal by emulating the methodologies and organizational structures of successful research projects administered by the National Science Foundation (NSF). The NSF devoted much of its substantial funding to

reforming elementary and secondary science education by developing curricular projects to promote scientific literacy and “make the substance and scope of science more central to the process of schooling” (Dow 3). Project English would follow the NSF in its curricular focus to reform English at all grade levels, and to make English a visible cornerstone of education. McMurrin explained that the research itself would be conducted “in the field by university people and high-level secondary people, working out proposed curriculum improvements, not with the idea of imposing these improvements upon the schools, but rather making them available to them,” while the USOE would simply provide an administrative structure (*Hearings before the Subcommittee* 330).

In addition to focusing on providing a specific structure for the research projects, McMurrin requested a budget of just over \$1 million, indicating the general breakdown of expenditures for filling administrative positions, establishing curriculum study centers, and conducting needed research (*Hearings before the Subcommittee* 479, 484). It seems likely, then, that despite McMurrin’s initial appeal to the humanistic importance of education, the project’s narrower constraints were persuasive to a fiscally minded Congress less interested in humanistic study than in reclaiming American educational and technological superiority. That Project English was able to mirror NSF strategies in finessing research projects to meet the humanistic needs of the field in spite of funding restrictions speaks to creative and agile rhetorical negotiations on the part of those involved in planning and administration.

Only a year after the USOE’s “first venture in the area of programmed curriculum research and development,” in a *PMLA* article, Ralph C.M. Flynt, Associate Commissioner for Educational Research and Development, declared Project English “to be on the way to becoming a substantial success” (30). Flynt astutely contextualized Project English as a reform effort born



not out of the Sputnik crisis, but out of the federal government's continuing concern for education. He then went on to explain to his readers (perhaps preaching to the choir), that "English teaching has been steadily hampered by insufficient research, too little experimentation, insufficient dissemination of what is known, and uncertainty about the best ways to deal with the tremendous complexities of the language, the multitudinous literary selections that might conceivably enrich learning, and the great differences among children themselves" (31). Project English, then, according to Flynt, provided one answer to persistent calls from NCTE and other organizations for national leadership on supporting research in these issues.

### *Discursive Alliances*

The NCTE's campaign to draw attention to inadequacies in the teaching and learning of English seized upon an exigency shaped by public concerns of crisis, national defense, and educational excellence. Their strategies in addressing and reshaping those topoi justified federal funding for Project English, as did McMurrin's delimitation of the project. The rhetorical work to justify Project English, however, did not end with Congressional approval. Project English researchers continued to respond to public concerns about education through the implementation of the Curriculum Study Centers. The key strategy in this aspect of Project English's attempt to forge alliances with public constituencies was to draw on—and reframe—the research methodologies of other disciplines (especially those that had currency in public valuations of research in education). In doing so, Project English made itself legible to stakeholders outside of English, responding to the pragmatic constraints imposed by these public valuations of educational research by crafting proposals for Curriculum Study Centers through the empirical languages and methodologies in currency outside the field. At the same time, they also resisted the constraints

by asserting their own valuations of needed research in the teaching and learning of English to educate USOE officials about the kinds of inquiry that would be most productive.

To conduct this research though—and to call for the research they deemed necessary—Project English leaders had to gain government approval for the Curriculum Study Centers, which meant they had to craft their proposals in a language legible to the USOE’s Research Advisory Council. For the first year, before Hook took over as coordinator, two separate USOE screening committees reviewed proposals for Project English Curriculum Study Centers.<sup>22</sup> The first screening panel, a group of English specialists, was comprised of Albert Kitzhaber, Theodor Clymer, and Robert Pooley (Donlan 5). The Research Advisory Council, which was comprised of experts from outside of English appointed by the Commissioner of Education, conducted the second screening and held final decision-making power. One difficulty with this relatively uncoordinated process, according to Hook, was that “it was necessary at first to fit the various pieces of Project English into the existing machinery of the Cooperative Research Branch [of the USOE].” For example, Project English had to adhere to the deadlines already established by that Branch, and the method of selection of proposals had to conform to the procedures already in use (“First Year” 33). Moreover, because the expert Research Advisory Council was comprised of educational psychologists, it was ill equipped to evaluate proposals in light of the needs felt by English specialists. Accordingly, Project English’s rhetorical negotiations required a balance between fitting its work into this pre-existing machinery, while simultaneously attempting to educate USOE experts about English needs.

With each Project English proposal, English teachers had to convince the screening committees and, ultimately, the USOE, that their projects would yield significant “research to improve the teaching of reading and the written and oral usage of the English language”

(*Hearings before the Subcommittee* 330). Moreover, they had to convince their reviewers that such projects were worthy of federal investment. Indeed, Strain argues that such research projects were “part of a rich and complex network of changes within English studies that prompted shifts in economic, rhetorical, and political relationships: the domain of English studies became accountable to a force outside its academic boundaries” (515-516). This network of changes meant, among other things, that successful proposals strategically utilized the quantitative research language and methodologies privileged by the Research Advisory Council. According to Steinberg, “evaluation, measurement, and research design were the bywords” for successful proposals (“Research in the Teaching of English” 50).

Given that proposals were approved or denied by educational psychologists rather than English specialists, a key part of Project English’s administrative work was teaching teachers to speak the language of empirical research. English teachers then, as is often the case now, were largely unfamiliar with the kinds of hypothesis-driven research projects favored in the sciences, or with the objective standards of measurement and evaluation required of all Project English research (Strain 526). Thus, Project English administrators recognized that teachers had to develop fluency in this discourse. The critical need for English teachers to learn the discourse necessary for successful proposals was so important that Project English took the opportunity to teach teachers to articulate their research agendas in the empirical register valued outside the field: through the duration of Project English, a number of presentations at the Conference on College Composition and Communication advised attendees on the textual features of successful proposals.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the difficult rhetorics of negotiation English teachers engaged in writing their proposals, the first three Project English Curriculum Study Centers—at Nebraska, Northwestern,

and Carnegie Institute of Technology—were approved to begin in June of 1962.<sup>24</sup> Most of the Curriculum Study Centers were, as I mentioned above, devoted to developing, implementing, and assessing English curricula for elementary through high school students, while a handful of centers researched more specialized curricula (see Figure 1).

The range of research funded through Project English's Curriculum Study Centers indicates the field's pre-disciplinary commitments to a dynamic and wide-ranging research agenda. Through its focus on reading and composition, Project English encompassed a variety of research projects designed to create and test a sequential English curriculum across all grade levels. Collectively, they helped to shape English's disciplinary definition as it was articulated in *The National Interest*: English studies are located in the nexus of literature, language, and composition study. Indeed, this sort of definitional work was an explicit motivation for Project English, especially in the wake of the failures of life-adjustment education. As a 1964 *Iowa English Yearbook* reported,

many of [those in English] have become increasingly embarrassed—partly by developments in other fields than our own—about the uncertainty, inefficiency, and incoherence of the English curriculum at all levels. The recent attempts in our professional organizations to define our discipline are one response to this embarrassment; the Project English curriculum studies are another.” (2)

It is also the case that, in addition to sponsoring a broad definition of English studies, these projects—undertaken during the same time period often cited as composition's disciplinary beginnings—are the initial iterations of the composition research that many historiographers point to as evidence of *composition's* disciplinarity (Berlin, Crowley, Goggin, T. Miller, North). Project English yielded productive research in writing and teaching—research that provided

fertile ground for future study. As I will show in the following sections, the collaborative research funded by the government and undertaken in various Project English Curriculum Study Centers played an important role in setting the stage for composition to grow into a discipline that values multifaceted research projects and methodologies.

### *In Pursuit of Excellence*

One of the most prominent ways that Project English researchers and teachers used the empirical languages and methodologies valued by the USOE was to propose their research agendas for Curriculum Study Centers through the lynchpin terms and values of the NDEA. For example, the majority of funded Curriculum Study Centers focused on developing articulated curricula for the “able” college-bound student. A relatively opaque term, the “able” student was sometimes defined as the “superior” student, ranked in the top twenty percent of high school students (*Curriculum Development* 8; *Iowa English Yearbook* 2). Given that the USOE archives provide ample evidence of national interest in “encouraging” the “able” student, it seems safe to assume that the national desire for educational and technological superiority tacitly motivated the Research Advisory Council’s approval of projects aimed at the “able” or high-achieving college student (Flynt, Hoole).<sup>25</sup> Bolstered by various reports from White House Conferences on education, Congress was interested in research that would both identify able (or superior) students, and enable them to obtain an education commensurate with their abilities (Sneed np). As such, the Curriculum Study Centers’ development of curricula to advance the skills and knowledge of the upper echelon of elementary and secondary students is consonant with government investments in reestablishing the preeminence of American education.

Indeed, it is not insignificant that the first three Curriculum Study Centers approved by the Research Advisory Council all focused—in both name and in practice—on the academically “able,” college-bound student. The Carnegie Institute of Technology Curriculum Center, directed by Erwin Steinberg, researched a curriculum for “The Development of a Sequential and Cumulative Program in English for Able College-Bound Students in Senior High School, Grades 10-12.” While the Northwestern and Nebraska centers do not specify their curriculum is meant for “able” students, it seems clear that the very lack of specification indicates such a focus, especially when juxtaposed with the handful of Project English centers explicitly working on curriculum for “disadvantaged” students.<sup>26</sup> Northwestern’s Curriculum Study Center in English, directed by Wallace Douglas, researched the teaching of composition in an attempt to bring together “what scholars know about English or could discover about it and what school teachers know about children and what was possible in the classroom” so as to make recommendations for strengthening writing instruction in elementary education (“The Beginning” np). Similarly, Paul Olson at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, worked to develop “An Articulated Program in Composition” (Grades K-13), which would identify and remediate certain deficiencies in English teaching and learning.

As we can see in these Curriculum Study Centers’ endeavors, accommodating government interest in improving education for the “able” student significantly shaped Project English’s research, turning its collective focus to the questions, methodologies, and constituents privileged by government stakeholders. Before looking at how the Project English researchers involved in these centers utilized the projects for their own purposes, developing curricula for “able” students for a variety of productive ends (beyond national defense or educational

superiority), I think it will be helpful to look more closely at the respective structures and agendas of the Carnegie Tech and Nebraska Curriculum Study Centers.

A press release issued on April 17, 1962 by the Carnegie Institute of Technology News Service announced the establishment of its Project English Curriculum Study Center—a four-year program in cooperation with five local school systems, funded with a grant of almost \$220,000 (1). Erwin Steinberg, director of the center and dean of Margaret Morrison Carnegie College, described the primary objective of the center as “the development of a sequential and cumulative program for English for able college-bound students because many high schools want to improve the ability of their top graduates to communicate clearly and to read challenging material with understanding” (1). Four faculty members from Carnegie Tech’s Department of English and one from the Department of Psychology shared major responsibility for the program, working on course and curriculum development, and leading three summer planning sessions that involved English teachers from participating high schools. Given the Project English mandate to coordinate with local teachers, it is worth noting that two of the English faculty administrators held split course loads, teaching one course at the university, and one in a local high school; the curriculum development was intended to be a collaborative—not a top down—effort. In theory, then, Project English sponsored collaborative, cross-institutional relationships between teachers of all grade levels, which, as we will see in my analysis of the National Writing Project, proved an important antecedent for the field’s future public engagements.<sup>27</sup>

The three summer planning sessions each focused on curriculum development for a single grade level; as each course was developed, it was tried in the schools during the following academic year, revised the following summer, tried again, and then evaluated. The first, in the summer of 1962, involved the five administrators, ten teachers from participating high schools,

and four recent Carnegie Tech graduates entering the teaching field that fall. The participants, according to Steinberg, focused on two problems: “setting the goals for the whole three-year curriculum, and designing in detail the tenth grade course” (*Patterns and Models* 80). Defining English as the overlapping field of literature, language, and composition, the Carnegie Tech curriculum had seven major objectives:

1. To develop a program in literature for grades ten through twelve which will teach the student to read with understanding and sensitivity, and thus provide him with a skill essential to excellent work in college.
2. To develop a composition program for grades ten through twelve which, in ordered sequential steps, will lead to a growing mastery of writing skills.
3. To develop a sequential language program, consonant with contemporary studies in linguistics, which will increase the student’s understanding of the structure, the history, and the power of the English language.
4. To develop syllabi and other teaching materials which will interrelate the programs in literature, composition, and language into a cumulative three-year sequence.
5. To test the effectiveness of the cumulative sequence by introducing it experimentally into seven high schools of diverse types and sizes in the Greater Pittsburgh area.
6. To evaluate formally the total program by means of tests given to students in the cooperating schools.
7. To contribute toward defining a standard for high school English which colleges may consider in designing their freshman courses so that learning



may continue to be sequential and cumulative. (*A Senior High School Curriculum* 1)

The Carnegie Tech curriculum's emphasis on integrating literature, language, and composition—as well as its emphasis on testing various aspects of its program—are clearly derived not only from the arguments for Project English that we heard in McMurrin's testimony at the appropriations hearing, but also from the Research Advisory Council's commitments to evaluation and measurement.

The Nebraska Curriculum Development Center officially began its work, under another name, a full year before Project English funding was secured. In response to national dialogue about the crisis in English, a committee of the Nebraska Council of Teachers of English met in an institute session sponsored by the Woods Charitable Fund during the summer of 1961 to write a proposal for a coherent curriculum in English. Surveying three hundred representative Nebraska school districts, the committee identified certain deficiencies in English teaching and learning across the state (and, arguably, across the nation), including the problem of curricula based on no coherent conception of the subject or content matter central to English, and the problem of unsystematic and uncoordinated instruction (students either moved from one lesson to the next without any apparent sequence or repeated lessons from year to year). Their proposal, *A Curriculum for English*, was designed to address these deficiencies, and became the basis of the Nebraska Curriculum Development Center, directing efforts to create an articulated statewide curriculum for K-13.

Like the Carnegie Tech Curriculum Study Center, the Nebraska Curriculum Development Center defined English as the overlapping field of literature, language, and composition; however, the latter program differed from the former in that its language and

literature study served as the basis for instruction in composition. The center's seven main areas of work indicate their primary curricular and research emphasis on composition:

1. Composition and the usable portions of classical rhetoric (that is, the portions which do not relate to the grammar of classical languages).
2. Composition and the possibility of a new rhetoric; the rhetorical possibilities of "discourse analysis" and recent British studies of the philosophical "grammar and logic" of language.
3. Composition and its relation to structural and transformational grammar: the teaching of either of these as possibly freeing students from unnecessary linguistic restraints and exhibiting to them the variety of resources implicit in the grammar of English.
4. Composition and close reading: the teaching of literature and its use as a rhetorical or structural model; the analysis of it in student compositions.
5. The construction of criteria and tests for the measurement of excellence in composition.
6. The analysis of levels of student maturity at which basic composition "habits" or "patterns of decision" are formed.
7. The construction of criteria and tests for the correction of themes in the areas of syntax, logic, and persuasive strategy. (NCTE Commission 3; *Iowa English Yearbook* 29)

As dictated by Project English funding, the Nebraska center staff included English and Education faculty from the university, as well as K-12 teachers from participating school districts. The curriculum was developed primarily through "curriculum building institutes"

funded by an outside \$100,000 grant from the Wood Charitable Fund, to explore the significance of literary criticism, critical theory, and linguistics on developing composition curricula (*Final Report* 10). Lincoln, Omaha, York, and Westside school districts contributed teachers for the duration of the center's work, who were largely responsible for writing, testing, and revising the curriculum. Additionally, the school districts supported the project by committing to buy the literary texts necessary for the curriculum, and by promising course releases for pilot teachers in order to allow them sufficient time to prepare for teaching and evaluating the program (Olson "Final Report" 10). While there does not appear to be an extant list of the full Nebraska Curriculum Development Center staff, the Nebraska Council of Teachers of English Committee responsible for writing the initial "Curriculum in English" was comprised of business people, teachers (of all grade levels) from across the state, and representatives of the Nebraska State Department of Education, and of the state's private and public colleges (Olson "Final Report" 2). Paul Olson, Director of the Nebraska Curriculum Development Center, reports that the center continued to coordinate its work with these groups, as well as with commissioned scholars outside of Nebraska. The list of consultants includes such luminaries as Kenneth Pike, Francis Christensen, George Hillocks, and Edward P.J. Corbett (*Final Report* 11). In short, the Nebraska Curriculum Development Center clearly engaged the "cooperative" and "constructive" research mandated by Project English guidelines.

The organizational structure and main objectives of both the Carnegie Tech and Nebraska centers adhere to government paradigms of national defense and educational excellence in several ways, supporting a continued productive relationship between Project English and Congress. One important illustration of how federal legislation dictated the forms and functions of the Project English Curriculum Study Centers is the projects' shared interest in developing a

sequence of instruction spanning from three to twelve years, an interest that is significant in terms of how it addressed the national fervor for an articulated curriculum. As I discussed earlier, the Basic Issues Conference and *The National Interest* both raised concerns about incoherent subject matter diluted by the life-adjustment model, idiosyncratic instruction based on the propensities of individual teachers, and repetitive or non-progressive instruction. Students were left with large (and inconsistent) gaps in their knowledge or were forced to repeat the same lessons from year to year.

Carnegie Tech and Nebraska, like most Project English Curriculum Study Centers, worked to develop an extended sequence of instruction that would teach students across several grade levels. As a report on the Research Development Conference for Personnel of USOE Curriculum Study Centers suggests, “the very concept of sequence implies the belief that a succession of instructive experiences can be devised which will cause the student to progress to a greater mastery of some aspect of the subject” (Steinberg 6). Kitzhaber characterized the shift toward an articulated curriculum and away from the life-adjustment model of education as a movement toward “a kind of education characterized by greater intellectual rigor, greater emphasis on the particular academic subjects themselves as organized bodies of knowledge, with their own claims to interest and importance” (*Iowa English Yearbook* 3). The intersecting interests of defining a content area (definition) for English and developing an articulated sequence (across K-13) to help students develop “mastery” is significant in terms of the national concerns about the teaching and learning of English that I mentioned above. Not only would developing an articulated curriculum enable students to receive a rigorous education that was coherent across their schooling, but it would help define English studies—thereby requiring that teacher education (another major concern in national conversations about educational excellence)

be revamped to ensure teachers had the adequate intellectual background to teach the new curriculum.

In her analysis of Project English's engagements with the federal government, Strain argues that the "alliance with the federal government brought its own set of constraints and obligations, influencing the form and subject matter of scholarly inquiry and imposing in less-than-subtle ways a decidedly pragmatic directive for [Project English] researchers" (533). As I have shown, the Carnegie Institute of Technology Curriculum Center and the Nebraska Curriculum Development Center evidence these influences in their research agendas and empirically based evaluative methods. However, while I agree with Strain that the federal sponsorship of Project English carried with it certain influential constraints, it did not override the disciplinary investments of those English teachers and researchers working in the Project English Curriculum Study Centers. In other words, Project English researchers managed to both work within *and* subvert their "pragmatic directive" for their own purposes of solidifying a disciplinary definition, furthering literary study, and broadening the project's instrumental focus toward humanistic ends.

### *A Place for Literature*

Even as the Project English Curriculum Study Centers advanced the paradigm of educational excellence for national defense, they also resisted those obligations and constraints in order to conduct needed research in the teaching of English through the philosophies and approaches valued within the field. One important way that Project English researchers subverted federal oversight was to maintain literature within a program ostensibly funded to improve the teaching of reading and English composition. While preserving literature as a crucial

part of English seems a foregone conclusion now, Congressional trepidation over NDEA funding of literary study meant that it was no simple matter at the time. Teaching students to develop close, critical reading skills, to understand generic forms and purposes, to think analytically: these are all crucial skills for the kind of practical literacy the nation was calling for schools to teach. Literary study was seen, as it often is seen now, as focused on aesthetics and therefore irrelevant to the development of these practical skills.

I think it reasonable to believe that defining English as the interdisciplinary field of literature, language, and composition was helpful in demonstrating the impossibility of divorcing literature from the more practical skills of language and composition; however, as we saw in the NDEA hearings, articulating a disciplinary definition was not sufficient to quell Congressional concern about the value of literary study.<sup>28</sup> Project English circumvented the issue through the simple expediency of bootlegging literature into the curriculum by calling it reading. At the Nebraska and Carnegie Tech centers, for example, literature occupied a central place in the curricula. However, rather than trying to justify literary study for the sake of literary study, the importance of literature was articulated in terms of the critical reading skills that could be taught through a thoughtful and rigorous sequence of instruction.

According to Frank Rice, who co-directed the Nebraska center during its later years, literature was at the center of the Nebraska curriculum because

...it is our belief that the study of literature should acquaint students with the best that has been thought and said in Western culture. We regard the study of literature as being not merely an aesthetic experience but, more importantly, a moral education. We believe that if a 20<sup>th</sup> century student is going to have the ability to see his own time objectively, that he has to know other times with which

to compare and contrast his experience. Since literature is concerned primarily with the human, individual experience, the literature of western civilization is a record of the individual man—his feelings, his aspirations, his practical and social concerns, his religious and philosophical ideas. Students must explore these if these are to understand themselves and to establish their own identities—Who am I? Whither am I going? What should I achieve? (1)

Rice's explication of why literary study is important is firmly grounded in humanistic commitments—putting it in some tension with the instrumental conception of literacy in which Congress was interested. In theory, however, the curriculum was designed to lead students through the kinds of inquiry Rice describes in order to cultivate the kinds of practical literacy favored by the government. What individual teachers did in their classrooms is impossible to ascertain, but the key idea was that the literature component of the program would serve as a locus for integrating language and composition: it was not meant to stand alone as a study in literary aesthetics. In the curriculum for elementary students, literature was used to enhance students' understanding of language (as understood by structural linguists), as well as their composition skills (by exposing them to "language handled well") (Olson "Final Report" 16). In the junior and senior high school curriculum, the literary core again moved outward toward language and composition, this time with a decidedly rhetorical bent, as students were asked to bring their knowledge of linguistic rhetoric to bear on the study of literature (*Final Report* 17).

As I discussed earlier, the Carnegie Tech program was designed around literature in an effort to integrate instruction in language and composition, with one of its primary goals being to teach students to "read with understanding and sensitivity, and thus provide him with a skill essential to excellent work in college" (Steinberg *A Senior High School Curriculum* 1). Like

Nebraska, the Carnegie Tech staff defined literature in humanistic terms as “mankind’s record, expressed in verbal art forms, of what it is like to be alive” (Steinberg *A Senior High School Curriculum* 2). Organizing the study of language and composition around the literary core, the tenth grade program concentrated on reading world literature and universal concerns of man; the eleventh grade program on American literature to demonstrate how universal concerns are modified by the American culture, past and present; and the twelfth grade program on English literature, with attention to literary art forms, genres, and techniques.

As with the Nebraska curriculum, literary study in the Carnegie Tech program is used as a springboard for composition. Writing was introduced as a three-part process (roughly apportioned across the three-year curriculum) in which the writer must first isolate and define what he has to say, communicate his ideas in effective and appropriate language, and then modify his message according to the needs of his reader (Steinberg *Senior High School Curriculum* 10). Linguistic study was also parsed across the three-year curriculum: 10<sup>th</sup> grade students learn about the structure of the language, 11<sup>th</sup> grade students about semantics, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students about rhetoric and the effective use of language. Across the curriculum, language instruction was linked to literary study through the ways in which the English language changed as it progressed from Old to Middle to Modern (Steinberg *Senior High School Curriculum* 12). Again, it is impossible to know what went on in individual classrooms—and to what degree the described interrelationships between literature, language, and composition were instantiated—but the terms through which Project English researchers described their studies clearly leverage Congressional valuations of English.

More than a quarter of a century later, the Nebraska and Carnegie Tech curricula seem antiquated in their conservatism, in their treatment of literature as an expression of the universal



(or even nationalistic) concerns of man, in their skills-based philosophy of writing instruction. To simply dismiss the respective curricula on these terms, however, would be to overlook not only its significant pedagogical contributions, but also the ways in which it both adhered to and resisted the constraints tied to federal funding. As I discussed earlier, proposals for Project English Curriculum Study Centers had to fit within the USOE's existing application frameworks; of course, the "fit" was not simply about application procedures, but about ideological investments in the nature of English study. In her historical remapping of composition's disciplinary beginnings and the NDEA, Strain argues that "the rise of a research community in English...most significantly in composition, became entwined with and, at times, synonymous with notions of nationalism and national defense—part of a program to fortify the United States against perceived threats to its well being and democratic foundation" (515). Like all the Project English Curriculum Study Centers, then, the Nebraska and Carnegie Tech centers had to respond—tacitly, if not explicitly—to the notions of nationalism and national defense that funded their work.

In terms of maintaining a literary component in their research and curricular sequence, the centers forwarded a relatively conservative understanding of humanistic study—designing programs that asked students to interrogate such concerns as "universal concerns of man" and the "moral education" afforded by literature. Having entered the field in an era of social constructionism, I tend to wince at the idea of universality, or at the idea of being responsible for my students' moral education—but my argument here is not to recuperate the sequences designed by Project English Curriculum Study Centers, but to highlight how Project English researchers negotiated federal constraints in order to secure funding to further their own purposes, not just the federal government's. As we have seen in the Nebraska and Carnegie Tech

centers, such negotiations happened, at least in part, through subsuming literature under the rubric of “reading,” and by positioning literature as a starting point for the teaching of language and composition. Researchers thus maintained a place for literature within Project English, ensuring the continuation of research in the teaching and learning of language, composition, *and* literature.

### *Preparing for the Paradigm Shift*

Project English, as you will recall, was authorized through Public Law 531 to conduct research to improve the teaching of reading and English composition. The climate of crisis surrounding education in the years following Sputnik led Congress to authorize Project English in recognition of the need to revamp education across the curriculum, not just in science and technology. Of course, as we have seen, the funding did not come without strings—one of which was to use empirical methodologies to evaluate Project English’s research. As Francis Ianni, Director of the USOE Cooperative Research Branch that administrated Project English, told researchers, Congress and the general public often dismissed education research because it typically took place on a small scale, on relatively minor subjects, and yielded impractical results (24). Congress and the public wanted “well-crafted project designs and demonstrable results that promoted educational excellence and democratic ideals, not enrichment programs founded on principles of liberal humanism” (Strain 533). With Project English funding, the time was ripe to initiate a change in research in English.

Accordingly, one of the primary goals for Project English was to draw on the expertise and research methodologies of social sciences to evaluate research studies in the hopes of yielding significant *and* practical results to improve the teaching and learning of English

(Wasson *Allerton Park Conference*). While English teachers then, as now, were largely ill-equipped to apply to humanistic inquiry the kinds of empirical study valued in the social sciences, Project English researchers seemed to embrace the idea of cooperative, interdisciplinary evaluation methods. As Steinberg commented in one of his reports on Carnegie Tech's program, "I think that we are duty bound to test the usefulness of newly developed ideas and curricula, that such testing is the responsibility of the people who develop them, and that we must enlist the aid of the psychometricians in such work. However much I chaff at the new cult of the social sciences, I find even less congenial the more primitive notions of proof by simple testimonial or assertion" ("Research and Development" 85). Much of the research conducted in Project English Curriculum Study Centers is forgotten today, and, even if it were recuperated, it is not likely to stand the test of time. Nonetheless, despite the flaws we might now find in Project English research, it is important to recognize it not only for the progressive and cutting-edge scholarship it was at the time, but also for its foundational role in the developing field of composition.

Both Carnegie Tech and Nebraska's concern to test their new courses speaks to the national call for "more 'research' into the educational process through studies of English curricula and through experiments with various pedagogical techniques" (Wasson *Allerton Park Conference* 2). In addition to revising the curriculum two and three times after "field testing" it in the classroom, the Nebraska center commissioned a number of evaluative projects to determine the effectiveness of their curricular designs, including one on cognitive development and children's composition, and one on the syntax of children's writing. The results of these evaluative studies are not included in the center archives, so it is difficult to ascertain the importance of their findings, but perhaps the lasting value of these studies is not in the results,

but in the methodological questions they raised. Based on the final report Olson submitted to the USOE, we know that many of the studies unfortunately suffered from changing personnel and ill-conceived applications of empirical methodologies. More importantly, we know that the Nebraska staff struggled with the “question of ‘methods of evaluation’ for such a project as a Curriculum Center” throughout the Center’s existence.

The Carnegie Tech program also undertook a variety of evaluative studies that followed empirical research methodologies of hypothesis-driven studies, experimental and control groups, random selection of subjects, etc. Steinberg, like Olson, is candid in all of his project reports about the difficulties of empirical research methodologies for studying English teaching and learning; at the same time, he is insistent that English teachers have much to learn from psychologists about rigorously examining our procedures and goals, and about articulating what it is we want students to be able to *do* as a result of our teaching. It is difficult to reconstruct the hypotheses, methodologies, or results of the evaluative studies based on the limited archival materials available. It does seem possible, however, to posit a teleological progression from Project English’s empirically driven studies to the wide-ranging research agendas and methodological pluralism that characterize composition today.

If Project English researchers were bound by federal guidelines to adopt research methods more suited to the social sciences than to English, their struggles to apply those methods in ways that would yield substantial and significant results became the subject of vigorous conversation, not to mention of several conferences dedicated to research considerations. It seems likely that the difficulty of applying social science methodologies to humanistic inquiry motivated at least some researchers to turn to other disciplines for methodological approaches better suited to the kinds of research they wanted to conduct. After all, the need for substantial

research in the teaching and learning of English was widely agreed upon across not only the profession, but across public constituencies. If the “psychometricians” could not help Project English researchers design and conduct studies that could deliver significant results, it makes sense that the researchers would turn elsewhere for methodological support. While we can only speculate as to whether and how Project English researchers themselves turned to other methodological approaches, it is certainly true that the next generation of composition scholars, building on the work of Project English, moved away from empiricism to embrace a range of studies and approaches.

It is also worth noting that in terms of developing a research program guided by the paradigms and philosophies valued within the field (rather than by the federal government), while the Curriculum Study Centers were, as I said earlier, fairly conservative by today’s standards, they were much more cutting edge in their own time. The Nebraska and Carnegie Tech programs, like most Project English centers, researched the efficacy of a “sequential and cumulative program.” Their work here was heavily influenced by Jerome Bruner’s theory of a spiral curriculum, and was integrated into an emphasis on inductive teaching. The spiral curriculum focuses on common core areas of study, layering in new emphases each year, building on what went before with the goal of developing a curriculum that deepens and becomes more sophisticated as it advances. It is not difficult to see this interest in a sequential, cumulative curriculum as a response to the haphazard, anything goes curriculum of the life-adjustment model that had been in favor. The program’s inductive teaching methods also push against this former trend in that the teacher does not relinquish responsibility, as she would in the loose, student-centered theories of the life-adjustment model. Rather than turning the student loose in the classroom, the inductive teacher “provide[s] the students with structured situations in

which, through conscious interaction with the teacher, they master the skills of English,” thereby discovering knowledge and skills (Steinberg *A Senior High School Curriculum* 13). A few years later, at the Dartmouth Conference, Project English’s interest in the process of inductive teaching and learning was obscured by what was seen as its overweening emphasis on an articulated curriculum for students to master. I think it important to remember, however, Project English drew heavily on contemporary research in education and psychology to employ what was then an untested pedagogy of inductive teaching. They were invested in graduating students with greater mastery of skills and subject knowledge, certainly, but they were equally interested in the processes by which students develop as learners and as writers. Their efforts on this front surely contributed to composition’s paradigm shift from product to process.

#### **IV. Lessons for the Moment**

Project English has long been relegated to the footnotes of our disciplinary history, yet it marks a time when English teachers and researchers dialogued with Congress and government agencies about the purpose and problems of literacy education. My aim in this chapter has been to reanimate this critical period in the field’s history to discover what we might learn from Project English’s strategies for creating collaborative, constructive engagements with multiple stakeholders. The suasive activities surrounding Project English’s initiation and implementation pushed important curricular and pedagogical questions into public spheres, ensuring that English teachers and researchers were able to participate in discussing those questions.

One way to understand Project English, then, is as a response to public concerns about the perceived crisis in education. Perhaps English’s exclusion from the NDEA was fortunate as it meant the profession was not subject to public scrutiny, or under attack, in the same ways that it

is in narrower conceptions of literacy crises. Instead of being faulted for failing to equip students with necessary literacy skills, English was viewed as peripheral to concerns about reclaiming educational excellence, especially in areas crucial to national defense. Freed from having to defend its professional expertise in the wake of specific attacks on literacy education, the profession strategically capitalized on concerns raised through the NDEA to gain support for its own work.

NCTE and Project English researchers attracted public and political support because they worked to articulate their mission in terms that had currency for their interlocutors. In short, Project English marks a moment in which the profession forged alliances with public stakeholders by articulating the field's concerns in ways that both corresponded with and challenged ideologies of pragmatic, utilitarian education, and of crisis, national defense, and educational excellence. While we might question the accommodationist implications of using these ideologies rather than refuting them, doing so risks dismissing the important work that Project English researchers were able to accomplish—work that has significantly shaped composition's research agendas and pedagogical commitments in the intervening years.

Many of the debates I've highlighted in my analysis of Project English—the disjuncture between public valuations of instrumental literacy skills and liberal humanism, the role of literature in literacy education, the privileged position of empirical research—are still contested today. Project English researchers did not “win” these debates. However, in engaging the debates, Project English was characterized by its collaborative work with teachers (of all grade levels) and educational agencies; by its desire to create an articulated curriculum to span all grade levels rather than focusing on a single course; and by its attempt to forward plural definitions of disciplinary work that complicated and expanded—rather than denied or

dismissed—the educational tropes that held currency in public discourse. My point is not to suggest that we replicate Project English, but that, in responding to our own kairotic moment, we can usefully draw on the strategies used by those working within the constraints and opportunities afforded by Project English.



**Project English Curriculum Study Centers, 1962-1968 (Figure 1)**

<b>University</b>	<b>Director(s)</b>	<b>Year(s) &amp; Grade(s)</b>	<b>Focus</b>
U of Minnesota	Stanley B. Keger	1962-1966, 7-12	Development & Preliminary Evaluation of Materials for the Study of the Nature & Uses of the English Language
Carnegie Institute of Technology	Erwin R. Steinberg	1962-1965, 10-12	A Sequential and Cumulative Program in English for Able College-Bound Students
U of Nebraska	Paul Olson & Frank Rice	1962-1967, K-12	Language & Literature Study as the Basis for the Development of Composition Work
Hunter College, CUNY	Marjorie B. Smiley	1962-1967, 7-9	English Language Arts Materials & Methods for Junior High School Students whose Achievement in English is Diminished Because of Environmental Disadvantages
Northwestern U	Wallace Douglas	1962-1967 7-12	Writing Process
U of Oregon	Albert R. Kitzhaber	1962-1967, 7-12	A Sequential Curriculum in English Focused on Literature, Language, & Rhetoric
New York U	Neil Postman	1963-1966, 7-12	Linguistics Demonstration Center
Teachers College, Columbia	Gerald Dykstra	1963-1966, 1-3	Teaching English as a Second Language
Syracuse U	Wm. D. Sheldon & Margaret J. Early	1963-1966, 7-12	Reading Instruction in Secondary Schools
U of Michigan	Daniel Fader	1963-1967, 7-12	Reading & Writing for the General Student ("English in Every Classroom")
U of Georgia	Mary Tingle & Rachel Sutton	1963-1968, K-6	Developing Competency in Written Composition
Florida State U	Dwight L. Burton	1963-1968, 7-9	Language, Literature, & Composition Instruction in the Junior High School

Indiana U	Edward B. Jenkinson	1963-1968, 7-12	Ordering Fundamental Concepts in Literature, Language, & Composition in Inductive Teaching Programs to be Adapted for Students of Varying Abilities
Hunter College, CUNY	Mary Finocchiaro	1964-1966, K-1	Bilingual Readiness in Early School Years
Hunter College, CUNY	Paul King	1964-1966, K-1	Bilingual Readiness in the Primary Grades
Gallaudet College	Harry Bornstein	1964-1966, 7-12	English for Deaf Students
Tuskegee Institute	G. T. Dowdy	1964-1966, Adults	New Ways to Teach Functionally Illiterate Adults
Purdue U	Arnold Lazarus	1964-1967, 7	An Integrated Curriculum in Literature, Language, & Composition
Northern Illinois U	Andrew MacLeish	1964-1967, 12	Curriculum in Linguistics & Composition
U of Illinois	J.N. Hook	1964-1969, College Level	Illinois State-Wide Curriculum Study Center in the Preparation of Secondary School English Teachers
UC, Los Angeles	Clifford H. Prator	1965-1967, 1-3	English as a Second Language
Western Michigan U	William P. Viall	1965-1967, College Level	Framing Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of English in the Elementary & Secondary Schools
Ohio State U	Frank J. Zidonis & Donald R. Batemen	1965-1969 7-9	Development of Composition Units Based on Generative Grammar and Psycholinguistic Theory

Figure compiled from the *Summary Progress Report of English Curriculum Study and Demonstration Centers* by the NCTE Commission on the English Curriculum (1966) and from Erwin Steinberg's "Research on the Teaching of English under Project English" (1964)

*An advanced civilization must not limit its efforts to science and technology alone, but must give full value and support to the other great branches of scholarly and cultural activity in order to achieve a better understanding of the past, a better analysis of the present, and a better view of the future. Democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens. It must therefore foster and support a form of education, and access to the arts and the humanities, designed to make people of all backgrounds and wherever located masters of their technology and not its unthinking servants.*

~The National Foundation on the Arts  
and the Humanities Act (1965)

### **3. From Science to Humanities: Recalibrating the National Interest The National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminars, 1973-1987**

Post-Sputnik education reforms, as I discussed in the previous chapter, were framed largely through the topoi of crisis, defense, and educational excellence. In the late 1950s, scientific and technological advancement were prioritized as crucial to national defense, and millions of dollars were poured into reforming education in those key areas. According to Stephen Miller, author of *Excellence and Equity*, one of the few published histories of the National Endowment for the Humanities, “[t]he fear that the Soviet Union was moving ahead of the United States in scientific and military know-how prompted a tremendous increase in the budget for NSF [National Science Foundation]: the last pre-Sputnik appropriation was for \$40 million; the first post-Sputnik appropriation, \$130 million” (11). Educational excellence in critical areas of science and technology were seen as the key to reclaiming the United States’ status as a world superpower. However, by the mid-1960s—only a few short years later—the tide turned in the court of public opinion: science was no longer seen as the path to salvation.

The problem was not the national focus on science, so much as the growing perception that the humanities had been overlooked. As one report suggested, the overwhelming emphasis

on science meant that “[w]ithout really intending it, we are on the road toward becoming a dehumanized society” (*Commission on the Humanities* 111). Rather than subordinating the humanities to science, prevailing judgments began to view them as complementary areas of study, providing humane values to temper scientific objectivity. This shift in public sentiment was captured in a *New York Times* report on the Commission’s findings, which quoted William S. Moorhead, one of the first members of Congress to propose legislation for a national humanities foundation. Moorhead argued in terms that were picked up and repeated in numerous subsequent debates: “[i]n an age in which we have seen of necessity a spectacular growth in science, it is essential that we preserve the interdependence of science and the humanities, so that men will remain masters of their technology and not its unthinking servants” (“Help for the Humanities” E7). Public enthusiasm for correcting the imbalanced support offered to the sciences and the humanities swelled during the first half of the 1960s, prompting the passage of Public Law 89-209, The National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965.

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) originated in the 1965 legislation, paving the way for a pivotal era in composition and rhetoric’s disciplinary development: the NEH-sponsored Summer Seminars for College and University Teachers. Between 1973 and 1987, the NEH funded dozens of seminars in composition and rhetoric, affording hundreds of university faculty an opportunity to study with leaders of the emerging field. These seminars are widely credited as foundational to the nascent discipline because they introduced scholars with doctoral degrees in literature to the intellectual work of the teaching of writing. According to Maureen Daly Goggin, “[t]he importance of these seminars...in the development of rhetoric and composition cannot be overstated, although their influence is hard to measure precisely because so much of it was intangible” (113-115). Certainly, many of the participants are unequivocal in

stating the seminars' value in helping them establish scholarly projects that were (and remain) foundational to their work as scholars and teachers. There is another aspect to the NEH seminars, however, that is equally important—and perhaps equally intangible. That is, in addition to aiding in “the retooling of those with PhDs in literature to specialize in rhetoric and composition” (Goggin 105), the seminars are a site of productive engagements between the discipline and the federal government.

In funding these seminars, the NEH (authorized and funded by the federal government) became a public stakeholder in literacy education, setting forth guidelines for the purposes and functions of the seminars. Whereas Project English was instigated through the concerted efforts of English teachers working collaboratively with the Department of Education, composition and rhetoric scholars were not integral in initiating the NEH program that administered the seminars, nor were their engagements with the NEH coordinated through the NCTE. Even though composition and rhetoric scholars did not participate in the initial stages of the Endowment, the individual scholars who led summer seminars over the fourteen years they were funded helped to expand the NEH's conception of humanistic study to include a robust definition of literacy. Working within the frameworks established by the NEH, composition and rhetoric scholars developed their own seminars to help “grow” the nascent field, speaking back to the NEH and educating it about critical areas of disciplinary growth and expertise.

In this chapter, then, I provide a brief history of the NEH, showing how public conversations about education shifted from the post-Sputnik emphasis on science and technology in the interest of national defense to a broader conception of the complementary nature of scientific and humanistic education. Within this framework, the NEH established its Summer Seminars for College and University Teachers, providing opportunities for composition and

rhetoric scholars to open lines of communication with NEH officials in order to claim a professionalizing space for the discipline. Drawing from seminar proposals and reports, as well as from personal interviews with seminar leaders and participants, I consider not only the enabling constraints the NEH provided for seminar leaders to grow the field, but also how the field worked to educate the NEH about the emerging discipline and the role of literacy in rich humanistic study. Finally, I trace some of the lasting effects of the seminars in providing an intellectual home for the seminar participants, and in helping them develop the confidence to articulate their intellectual commitments and pedagogical values to multiple publics throughout their careers.

## **I. Changing the Conversation**

As the United States transitioned from its Cold War mentality to the social turmoil of the sixties, public concerns mounted about the place of science in American culture—and about the need to balance scientific advances with a humanistic focus. According to Miller:

...many Americans were beginning to worry that the success of science might damage the social fabric of the nation. The critical skepticism of science, they argued, corroded traditional religious and moral values. No matter how necessary scientific research was to the defense of the nation or to the fight against disease, it was disturbing to see the sciences singled out for honor and support. (12)

However, while there was public approbation for the civilizing influence and cultural enrichment of the humanities, defining the use value of the humanities was more difficult. As the humanities gained greater attention in the public sphere, academic humanists worked to make a case for

federal sponsorship along the same lines as that given to the National Science Foundation (and to science education through the National Defense Education Act).

The American Council of Learned Societies, the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States, and the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa joined forces as co-sponsors of a National Commission on the Humanities. The Commission, chaired by Barnaby Keeney, President of Brown College, was charged with studying the state of the humanities in America in order to make recommendations for improvement to the sponsoring organizations (Commission on the Humanities *I*).<sup>29</sup> The report itself is a pithy sixteen pages (accompanied by appendices on “The Humanities in the Schools” and “Libraries for the Humanities,” as well as supplementary “Reports from Twenty-four Learned Societies”), and makes a coherent argument for the importance of the humanities to national well being, and for the need for federal support akin to that given the sciences. A reading of the report reveals that the Commission leveraged many of the same suasive strategies that were so successful during deliberations about Project English: claiming a crisis in humanistic study, drawing on the public support and attention previously directed to the sciences, and broadly defining the humanities as essential both to academia and to public life.

### *Creating a Crisis*

The *Report of the Commission on the Humanities* depicts a crisis in the humanities, claiming that the consequence of devaluing the humanities in recent years was that “a student may often enter a college or university without adequate training in the humanities or, for that matter, a rudimentary acquaintance with them” (6). The result of such devaluing was twofold: 1) humanistic scholars, “the professionals, so to speak,” were limited in reaching their full

potentials and in “attracting enough first-rate individuals into their ranks,” and 2) students were failing to gain the historical, cultural, and aesthetic knowledge necessary for full civic engagement (6). The crisis, then, was consequential to both academia and the public sphere—which later became a critical point in Congressional deliberations about the NEH and its function in serving academic and public constituencies.

### *Bipartisanship across Disciplines*

In sketching the crisis, the Commission’s report also works to cast the humanities as a necessary complement to science. Linking the humanities and the sciences as interdependent fields was a crucial strategy in the Commission’s recommendation to establish the NEH, and one that was carried forward into the endowment’s operational procedures for the summer seminars. The linkage also helped establish the humanities as worthy of federal support, for the federal government traditionally supported those things that were thought to be in the national interest (which the sciences were clearly acknowledged to be). Their argument, then, was that the humanities are also in the national interest. As the report states,

Upon the humanities depend the national ethic and morality.... On our knowledge of men, their past and their present, depends our ability to make judgments—not least those involving our control of nature, of ourselves, and of our destiny. Is it not in the national interest that these judgments be strong and good? (7)

Indeed, the Commission argued that it was in the national interest to support the interdependence of science and humanities as only a “fully educated people”—both scientifically and humanistically literate—“will be capable of sound judgment in government, in business, or in their daily lives” (6). Reconciling science and the humanities in this way allowed the



Commission to frame their argument for humanistic support as an extension of the national defense rhetoric that had been so successful a few years prior, recasting the issue instead as a bipartisan concern for the national interest.

### *Articulating a Use Value*

Critical to the Commission's argument that the humanities are indeed in the national interest is the report's work to situate humanistic study within daily life rather than exclusively within academe. To do so, the Commission begins its report by defining the humanities as "the study of that which is most human," most essential to the substance of our lives:

One cannot speak of history or culture apart from the humanities. They not only record our lives; our lives are the very substance they are made of. Their subject is every man. We propose, therefore, a program for all our people, a program to meet a need no less serious than that for national defense. We speak, in truth, for what is being defended—our beliefs, our ideals, our very highest achievements.

(1)

The Commission's recommended "program" is situated within disciplinary boundaries, including the study of history, literature, religion, philosophy, and the arts. However, it also recognizes the centrality of moral, religious, and aesthetic ideals in humanistic study—in short, the humanities are the study and expression of human experience.

As part of their unequivocal valuation of the role humanistic study plays in experiencing and understanding the world, the Commission appears to recognize the need to demonstrate a clear use value for the humanities, lest they be relegated to the rarefied and elitist world of academia, divorced from everyday life. In anticipation of such critiques, the Commission asserts

the humanities' importance as "functioning components of society which affect the lives and well-being of all the population" (2). Humanistic endeavors, according to the Commission, are necessary both for individual growth and for civic engagement. To add to the use value of the humanities, the Commission returns to its previously established idea of the interdependence between the humanities and science, claiming that "[s]cience is far more than a tool for adding to our security and comfort. It embraces in its broadest sense all efforts to achieve valid and coherent views of reality; as such, it extends the boundaries of experience and adds new dimensions to human character" (2). The humanities enable the study, analysis, and interpretation of human experience, and the sciences enhance such work by offering new epistemological methods for discerning the world, thereby expanding the "boundaries of experience." Together, then, they are of use in our daily lives, helping us find new ways to know and interpret the changing world in which we live.

The suasive strategies evident in the *Report of the Commission on the Humanities*—claiming a crisis, linking humanistic and scientific study, and defining the public function and use of the humanities—are perhaps more important for my purposes than the Report's ultimate recommendation that the United States establish an independent National Humanities Foundation. The recommendation to establish the foundation was of course crucial in subsequent Congressional deliberations (a point which I will discuss in more detail in the following section), but I think even more noteworthy is the fact that the report was widely distributed among persons who could assist in bringing to actuality the recommendation of the Commission (v). While there is no information available as to identities of those persons, one can easily imagine that in addition to the members of the sponsoring agencies, the report went to Congressional representatives, business and philanthropic leaders, and public intellectuals. With the report's

dissemination, the suasive strategies identified above surely circulated across diverse constituencies, contributing to them being carried forward into the NEH legislation and organizational principles. The key ideas contained within these strategies were thus significant to the NEH programmatic guidelines for summer seminars. As a result, these ideas indirectly helped to shape the field's disciplinary growth when composition and rhetoric scholars worked within those guidelines to propose and offer a variety of seminars.

## **II. Congressional Conversations**

The Commission's persuasive report generated widespread Congressional interest, resulting in a number of different legislative proposals to establish national foundations for the arts and humanities. Indeed, during the first few weeks of the 89<sup>th</sup> Congress's first session, 76 bills relating to the arts and humanities were introduced—co-signed by 40 Senators and 105 Representatives (Berman 2). In February and March of 1965, the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare empowered its Special Committee on Arts and Humanities to hold hearings on the proposed bills. The committee heard testimony from over fifty witnesses in support of government sponsorship for the arts and humanities.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike the NDEA hearings, where the NCTE and USOE had to persuade Congress of the importance of literacy education, the committee in this case was predisposed to respond affirmatively. Not only was public attention already turning toward the humanities, but the committee chair, Senator Claiborne Pell, was the originating author for two of the bills, S315 and S316 (to establish a National Arts Foundation and a National Humanities Foundation, respectively). Surely the harmonious nature of the hearings had much to do with the fact that the committee chair was so supportive as to have introduced legislation to establish foundations for

the arts and humanities. The witnesses testifying to the need for national investments in the arts and humanities were speaking to an already sympathetic audience. Certainly, exchanges between witnesses and the committee were cordial, even effusive, as evidenced by Pell's opening statement, when he introduces Keeney as "[o]ur first witness—and we are lucky to have him...as Chairman of the Commission on the Humanities [he] can be considered the leading spokesperson for the humanities. The Commission's report is fundamental to much of the legislation we are considering...[and] it would be a great pleasure to hear [his testimony]" (*National Arts and Humanities Foundation Hearings* 200).

The pleasant demeanor characterizing the hearings can likely be attributed to the public shift away from science and toward the humanities. Rather than arguing against prevailing thinking, Keeney and other supporters of a national foundation for the arts and humanities merely had to draw out the new paradigms for enhancing the cultural health of contemporary society through linking science with the humanities that were already circulating in public, albeit primarily elite, spheres. As Fred Hechinger put it in his *New York Times* article, the proposed humanities foundation would work parallel to and even together with the National Science Foundation, giving "added strength both to science and the humanities as joint ingredients of modern society" (27). Indeed, in July of 1964 (just three months after the Commission published its report), Dael Wolfle published an article in *Science* magazine supporting the proposal. "In recent years," Wolfle claimed, "many scientists, whose fields have been prospering greatly, have recognized that special effort should be devoted to nurturing the humanities and arts" (449). In short, as I suggested above, the interdisciplinary resonances between the National Science Foundation and the proposed foundations for the arts and the humanities created a kind of

“bipartisan” support for the new foundations, opening lines of communication not only between the Commission and Congress, but also between scientists and humanists.

To draw out these paradigms linking science and the humanities, the Special Subcommittee selected excerpts from the Commission’s report to be written into the hearing records—these excerpts were largely arguments about the national need for mitigating the crisis in the humanities now that the scientific crisis of the 1950s had been resolved:

The state of the humanities today creates a crisis for national leadership. While it offers cultural opportunities of the greatest value to the United States and to mankind, it holds at the same time a danger that wavering purpose and lack of well-conceived effort may leave us second best in a world correspondingly impoverished by our incomplete success. The challenge is no less critical and direct than the one we have already met with our strong advocacy of healthy and generously supported science. It must be met in turn with equal vision and resolve. (*National Arts and Humanities Foundation Hearings* 202)

Extending the Commission’s arguments, Keeney and other witnesses argued that the arts and humanities—like the sciences—are in the national interest, and therefore as deserving of federal support.

### *In the National Interest*

To support the argument that the arts and humanities serve the national interest, Keeney, as Chair of the Commission on the Humanities, and Frederick Burkhardt, President of the American Council of Learned Societies and member of the Commission, shaped their testimony around the same three interrelated suasive strategies visible in the Commission’s report: 1)

asserting that in failing to attend to the humanities, the country faced a severe crisis; 2) delineating the use value of the humanities, especially as they enhance the sciences; and 3) locating the humanities' rightful place in the public sphere rather than in the rarefied world of academe. Keeney built on post-Sputnik rhetorics of crisis to both circumscribe the significant problems stemming from the country's failure to attend to the arts and humanities, and to assert the value of the humanities in serving the national interest. Claiming that "the stakes are so high and the issues of such magnitude that the humanities must have substantial support from the Federal Government" (*National Arts and Humanities Foundation Hearings* 204), Keeney went on to argue that "[w]e are today in the midst of a moral crisis quite as severe and quite as dangerous to the welfare of our country and society and to each of us—as dangerous as the crisis in science, technology, and military strength of which we became so dramatically aware when Sputnik went up (221). According to Keeney, the crisis in this case was a collective inability—or unwillingness—to make the thoughtful, informed, moral judgments necessary to living in an increasingly complex society; the ability to make those judgments grows out of partaking in a robust humanistic tradition.

### *Toward Civic Ends*

Keeney and Burkhardt both argued that the humanities are in the national interest, and, as such, deserving of federal support, precisely because they are integral to civic engagement in public life. For example, Keeney contends that in addition to adding to the aesthetic quality of our national life, those versed in the humanities are better equipped to make the evaluative judgments necessary to modern life than those who are not. Keeney makes a cogent argument for the value of the humanities to daily life, claiming that

[t]he humanities constitute man's interpretation of his environment, of himself, of his aspirations, his hopes, his fears, and above all else, of his society and the relation of individuals to it.... In the course of these efforts at interpretation, a great deal of beauty and meaning is added to our lives, without which they would be inconsequential, and through speculation man has the possibility of shaping his own future and that of his environment. Were the arts and the humanities simply elegant, beautiful, and an embellishment to our society, a case might be made for their support. They are, however, meaningful and useful. They help us to control our lives and society, to make our lives more interesting and stimulating, and to shape our environment and our relations with one another. For these reasons, their support is clearly in the national interest. (*National Arts and Humanities Foundation Hearings* 222)

Keeney's argument for the humanities' importance to the national interest makes a compelling case—especially because he does not make it at the expense of the sciences. Indeed, Keeney draws on “The Humanities and the Schools,” one of the appendices to the *Report of the Commission on the Humanities*, to suggest that “bipartisan” or interdisciplinary support was necessary to solve the crisis in ways that would “establish an interplay between the sciences and the humanities so that they may mutually complement and fortify each other: from such a relationship we may hope for citizens who are educated in the fullest sense of the term—interested, informed, inquiring, and tolerant” (*National Arts and Humanities Foundation Hearings* 209).

## *Humanities for the People*

Burkhardt also reminds his Congressional audience that the Commission's report proposes a humanities program for the nation, not for a select group of academics. His written testimony argues that

the case for the support of the humanities is the case for the preservation and improvement of the very bases of our civilization. As demonstrated by the experiences of the commission—only five of whose members were practicing scholars in the humanities—it is a case that scientists, lawyers, businessmen, as well as scholars find compelling. They no less than the scholars recognize how vital it is to understand and to communicate all that man has thought and created and experienced during his life on this earth. As President Johnson wrote last June, “The continued vitality of the humanities and of the arts in America is required not only for the enrichment of our lives as individuals, but also for the health and strength of our society.” (*National Arts and Humanities Foundation Hearings* 375)

Burkhardt's argument for the use value of the humanities hinges on the idea that the lives of people from all walks of life—not just from academe—are vitally enriched by the humanities. The cultural health of our modern society thus depends on robust humanistic activity both inside and outside the academy.

In reading Keeney and Burkhardt's expert testimony, it seems critical that they draw only a small distinction between scientists and humanists, one that has more to do with how each endeavors to engage the public sphere than with their intellectual commitments. Keeney, for example, claims that “scientists are concerned with the world and are willing to talk about it;



humanists are concerned with the world's people and are less willing to talk either about them or to them" (220). Taciturn humanists have contributed to public perceptions of the humanities as academic aestheticism, divorced from everyday life and lacking clear application. "In short," Keeney contends, "until we build a garden around the ivory tower and invite the public into it, we are apt to remain in our towers—cold, hungry, and alone" (220). Keeney's admission of humanistic scholars' collective inability to articulate their intellectual commitments to a general public is, of course, strikingly similar to claims composition and rhetoric scholars have made about disciplinary failures to make a persuasive case for its theoretical and pedagogical expertise.

This last, related aspect of Keeney and Burkhardt's suasive strategies—their insistence on locating the humanities not just in the academy, but also in the public sphere—is key to addressing Congressional concerns about the practical use value of the humanities. Inviting the public into the ivory tower is well and good, but it is not enough. Keeney again relies on "The Humanities and the Schools" to argue this point in his testimony, reminding his listeners that in making broad claims for humanistic studies, he is not talking about the humanities as a collection of studies designed mainly to produce scholars. Rather, he is concerned with every student who attends American schools, and with the "type of person and citizen [those students are] likely to become after [their] formal schooling has been completed" (*National Arts and Humanities Foundation Hearings* 208). To address these concerns, Keeney contends that humanists must work to transform themselves—and public perceptions of their work. "We may no longer just detach ourselves from the world," he says. "We must proclaim [our] conclusions to the world and we must help its inhabitants become wiser and better" (*National Arts and Humanities Foundation Hearings* 221).

*The National Endowment for the Humanities*

Keeney, Burkhardt, and the numerous other artists, actors, musicians, humanists, scholars, and educators who testified about the importance of national support for the arts and the humanities were ultimately successful in persuading representatives of the American people—the United States Congress—of the vital need to support the arts and humanities. The bill that President Johnson signed into law on September 29, 1965, the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965 (PL 89-209) provided for the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities as independent agencies to promote progress and scholarship. Drawing on the argument that national health could not be cultivated solely by scientific advancement, the bill declared that “[a]n advanced civilization must not limit its efforts to science and technology alone, but must give full value and support to the other great branches of scholarly and cultural activity in order to achieve a better understanding of the past, a better analysis of the present, and a better view of the future” (PL 89-209 np). Such efforts are important because, as the legislation proclaimed, “[t]he world leadership which has come to the United States cannot rest solely upon superior power, wealth, and technology, but must be solidly founded upon worldwide respect and admiration for the Nation's high qualities as a leader in the realm of ideas and of the spirit” (PL 89-209 np). Accordingly, the bill specified that

[t]he term 'humanities' includes, but is not limited to, the study of the following:  
language, both modern and classical; linguistics; literature; history; jurisprudence;  
philosophy; archaeology; comparative religion; ethics; the history, criticism and  
theory of the arts; those aspects of social sciences which have humanistic content  
and employ humanistic methods; and the study and application of the humanities  
to the human environment with particular attention to reflecting our diverse

heritage, traditions, and history and to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life. (PL 89-209 np)

Through this expansive rhetoric of humanistic ideals, the National Endowment for the Humanities was born.

### **III. Summer Seminars for College and University Teachers**

In 1970, the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities was reauthorized for the second time. The NEH's commitment to the national interest in elevating humanistic study meant that it put its increased budget appropriations toward enriching the Endowment's aid to teaching (*NEH 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Report* 60). The endowment developed a new program to improve teaching at the post-secondary level by providing college and university teachers opportunities for continued study in their academic fields. The focus on helping teachers increase their subject knowledge was intended to enrich their teaching of undergraduate students, which also served to maintain the NEH's insistence on defining the use value of humanities for the public sphere: the program was not intended to inspire a cadre of elite scholars, but of teachers who could take their new knowledge back into the undergraduate classroom to prepare students for participation in public life beyond the university.

In his history of the NEH, Ronald Berman, a Shakespearean scholar who served as chairman from 1972-1976, reports that a staff member came up with the idea for the program that was to become so important to composition and rhetoric: the Summer Seminars for College and University Teachers. The Summer Seminars were primarily research oriented—participants had to propose an independent research project in their applications, and the goal of the seminars was to offer advanced study in the subject areas—yet there was also an implicit focus on

strengthening undergraduate teaching in the colleges through advancing the seminarians' education. The seminar program, then, clearly grew out of the imperatives of the arguments for the humanities I discussed above: not only does the program focus on supporting teachers' intellectual projects, but it also demonstrates a commitment to general education (undergraduate teaching) to bring the humanities into the lives of undergraduate students. Berman reports that the Summer Seminars for College and University Teachers

[was] destined to become one of the Endowment's major programs because of its simplicity and usefulness: being intended to move teachers from small campuses without facilities for research to great universities which would undertake to re-train them. Small classes of these teachers would meet under the direction of experts in their field. They would have a chance to do work of their own, and then to institutionalize their ideas in courses at their home schools. It was a cheap and large-scale enterprise which could quickly transfer the benefits of universities to places which needed development, but had no chance of affording it. (25)

Based on these few guiding principles about bringing teachers from small campuses to research institutions to work under the direction of a distinguished scholar, we can see the NEH's interest in supporting college teachers who worked outside elite institutions; this was a program intended to provide access and support to teachers who worked at the lower end of the academic hierarchy, far outside the ivory tower.

In a personal letter to Walker Gibson, one of the first seminar leaders, Berman elaborated on these goals, claiming that "[t]hrough reflection and discourse with the seminar directors and their colleagues, the college teachers will sharpen their understandings and improve their ability to transmit their understandings to college students. Done on a large scale over a period of years,

these seminars should have some influence upon the quality of education in the colleges” (np). In both public and personal characterizations of the seminars, Berman privileges their research components, yet their implicit pedagogical goals become apparent when one reads further into the seminar requirements.

For example, according to the 1973 “Summer Seminars for College Teachers General Information and Application Instructions” for potential seminar leaders, the seminars were meant to help college teachers “influence the quality of education at their colleges” by improving their ability to teach *undergraduate* students (1 emphasis mine). Seminar leaders were given “wide latitude” to design their seminars, with the caveat that the subject be “broad enough to accommodate a broad range of interests, and that the seminar give integral attention to the challenge of transmitting humanistic understandings to the *undergraduate* student” (1 emphasis mine). The seminars leaders were to be chosen not only by virtue of their scholarly reputations, but also by “their interest and ability in *undergraduate* teaching” (1 emphasis mine). Similarly, the selected seminarians were to be well qualified to do the work of the seminar, and to have demonstrated their ability and commitment as *college teachers*” (2 emphasis mine). I have highlighted the NEH’s commitment to undergraduate teaching here because it is a clear response to the language of crisis we saw in the Congressional hearings over the proposed humanities foundation. Whatever the tension between academic and public valuations of the humanities, the NEH was committed to improving humanistic education at the undergraduate level in the interest of cultivating students’ capacities as citizens capable of informed historical, cultural, and aesthetic judgments—even if those commitments were expressed primarily in internal rather than public documents. The NEH, then, set the conditions for composition and rhetoric seminars, providing parameters for the field to work within and expand in the interest of growing the field.

Based on the available NEH materials, there is no clear indication why composition and rhetoric seminars were included in this program that did not acknowledge the field as falling under the umbrella of humanistic study (as indicated by the disciplines named in the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act). Lisa Ede, a participant in Richard Young's germinal seminar on Modern Developments in the Art of Invention, suggests one possible reason was that the purported literacy crisis of the 1970s, coupled with the job crisis for PhD's in English and the humanities, provided the necessary exigence for the NEH to fund seminars in composition and rhetoric. As Ede reflects, it was a time when

[m]any deans, provosts, and presidents became alarmed at [what was then viewed as a literacy crisis], and suddenly funding existed for basic writing and other new writing programs.... Many new PhD programs in rhetoric and writing were created, largely in English departments, beginning in the mid 1970s. But in the meantime there was a need for people with expertise to head writing programs. The NEH seminars helped people who had gotten PhD's in traditional literary studies to "convert" to rhetoric and writing. (email interview)

Ede's supposition as to why the NEH was willing to fund composition and rhetoric seminars is quite plausible as it seems to resonate with the NEH's desire to work with teachers who were materially, geographically, and intellectually located at the margins of their fields: as an emergent discipline, composition and rhetoric scholars were certainly marginal.

#### **IV. Enabling Constraints**

What we do know is that between 1973 and 1987 the NEH funded dozens of summer seminars in composition and rhetoric—seminars that, by all accounts, provided enabling

constraints to help establish a nascent discipline. The procedural guidelines set by the NEH for the kinds of seminars it was interested in funding, its criteria for selecting seminar leaders, and the kind of participants it wanted to accept, all set certain constraints for composition and rhetoric. At the same time, these constraints afforded the field opportunities to solidify its disciplinary boundaries, to expand its research and pedagogical interests, and to bring English scholars into the nascent field.

In *The Making of Knowledge*, Stephen North dates the disciplinary beginning of Composition with a capital C in 1963 with the Dartmouth Conference, marking the emergence of the new field by its need to “replace practice as the field’s dominant mode of inquiry” (15). Not only was Composition seeking to expand its disciplinary knowledge, it sought to do so through research “modeled in method and rigor on research in the sciences.... This was to be a new era, and it would demand new kinds of knowledge produced by new kinds of inquiry” (North 17). The NEH seminars, then, provided opportunities for senior scholars to assist a new generation of teachers interested in the study and teaching of writing at precisely the right moment: at a time when the field was working to broaden its expertise and to consolidate its intellectual commitments within a disciplinary framework. Reading the archive of interactions between seminar leaders and the NEH reveals that a secondary result of the enabling constraints framing the seminars is their effectiveness in opening lines of dialogue, allowing composition and rhetoric scholars to speak back to the NEH, educating it about how a rich undergraduate literacy education would serve the Endowment’s goal to make the humanities relevant to the general public.

The enabling constraints provided by the NEH revolved around the arguments for humanistic study that I discussed in the previous sections of this chapter: creating a stronger

relationship between science and the humanities, articulating a use value for humanistic study, and bringing the humanities out of the ivory tower and into everyday life. These constraints—policies and procedural guidelines for seminars—were especially consequential for composition and rhetoric as it worked to articulate its integral role within the humanities. David Bartholomae points out that

[the NEH seminars] had a particular valence for composition studies, because the people in charge of programs [at that time]... had been produced by graduate programs (many of them) that included no training in composition and rhetoric—that is, the new crop of experts in the field had been given little formal disciplinary preparation... And so these seminars functioned as a kind of quick introduction to the knowledge and methods one needed in order to profess expertise in the field. (291)

For the NEH, the seminars provided opportunities for marginalized teachers to gain access to humanistic study; in other words, it was a time when a government agency (a public stakeholder in literacy education), supported the field in some critical ways. For composition and rhetoric, the seminars provided opportunities for literary scholars to retool themselves for the jobs in which they found themselves after graduate school. More importantly, for my project, the NEH seminars also contributed significant opportunities for composition and rhetoric scholars to communicate with the NEH as a public stakeholder in literacy education, to share what the field knew about writing and the teaching of writing, and to gain financial support for needed areas of research and pedagogical development within the discipline.

It is difficult to accurately account for all the NEH seminars in composition and rhetoric, as there is no extant list. The NEH annual reports do not consistently list seminar titles, and the



specific NEH division through which the program was funded changed several times over the years, so the only way to trace the seminars is to comb through the listings of state grants, looking for those labeled “English,” “literature,” or even “interdisciplinary” seminars, and then make a determination based on the facilitating scholar’s expertise (see Figure 2). Still, to borrow Goggin’s approbatory terms, even an incomplete account makes for a “veritable who’s who list” of seminar leaders: luminaries such as Ann Berthoff, Lloyd Bitzer, William Coles, Edward P.J. Corbett, Wallace Douglas, Walker Gibson, Robert Gorrell, William Irmscher, James Sledd, Joseph Williams, Ross Winterowd, and Richard Young worked within NEH guidelines to lead seminars focused on various concerns within composition and rhetoric—from the theories and practices of teaching (first-year) writing to public rhetoric and argumentation, from the composing imagination to the modern arts of invention, from linguistics to style to the social control of standard English.<sup>31</sup>

#### *Guidelines for Seminars, Leaders, and Participants*

In the summer of 1973, the Endowment sponsored eleven seminars in English and American literature (and ten in history).<sup>32</sup> The guidelines for the seminars, and selection criteria for seminar leaders and participants, grew out of the NEH’s commitment to building bridges between science and the humanities, to articulating a use value for the humanities, and to making the humanities a vital component of civic life beyond the ivory tower. These commitments, then, provided an enabling constraint within which composition and rhetoric scholars could advance the field’s intellectual and pedagogical expertise by showing the NEH how disciplinary work spoke to the Endowment’s goals.

As we saw in the discourse leading up to creating the NEH, the Endowment maintained a keen interest in modeling itself after the National Science Foundation (NSF). Following the NSF, then, seminar proposals went through a two-tier peer review process, first by five to eight outside reviewers who were specialists in the field, then by a panel of scholars from different fields “to weigh [each] proposal in competition with others for the funds allocated to that particular program” (Miller 60). For the first few years of the program, however, this review process was preceded by a relatively informal, yet elaborate, system of peer recommendation: the NEH actively solicited recommendations for scholars who were both widely recognized within their fields, but who also were committed to undergraduate education, in hope that these scholars would propose seminars consonant with the NEH’s stated mission.

The NEH’s policy of soliciting recommendations for seminar leaders through a network of established scholars (and, in later years, from previous seminar leaders) was fortuitous for composition and rhetoric. Ronald Berman, NEH Chair, wrote a personal letter to Walker Gibson in late 1972, explaining the program and asking Gibson to consider offering a seminar in the summer of 1973, the first year of the program. Berman confided to Gibson that in the NEH’s “search for scholars to conduct these seminars, you have been recommended to us by the Modern Language Association as a person qualified for the task by reason of your scholarship and your ability and interest in undergraduate teaching” (np). Given the scarcity of peer scholars to review proposals for composition and rhetoric seminars, Gibson might not have been approved without the informal network of recommenders.

Even after the peer review system for seminar proposals was firmly established, according to Richard Young, the NEH vetting process continued to rely heavily on advice from veteran seminar leaders (personal interview). Young’s memory of the networking system

organizing much of the NEH's selection of seminar leaders is supported by a 1975 letter from Walker Gibson to Marjorie Berlincourt, Program Officer for the Division of Fellowships at the NEH: in response to a phone request from Berlincourt, Gibson recommended ten senior scholars "who in [his] judgment could direct very good summer seminars in the areas of rhetoric and the teaching of writing to undergraduates" (np). Four of the colleagues Gibson recommends did end up leading summer seminars in subsequent years: Wallace Douglas, Ross Winterowd, Robert Gorrell, and Edward P.J. Corbett (and, of course, there is no way to determine why his other recommendations did not).

The NEH programmatic guidelines and processes for approving seminar leaders proved a heuristic of sorts for composition and rhetoric; as former seminar leaders recommended scholars to lead future seminars, they worked within the enabling constraints of those guidelines to push for seminars geared toward the scholarship and practice of teaching writing. Similarly, seminar leaders utilized the specific profile the NEH had in mind for seminar participants to invite teachers who showed promise to grow the field.<sup>33</sup> Selection of the seminarians was officially left to individual seminar leaders, but the NEH did require certain criteria for vetting candidates. In 1973, those guidelines included selecting applicants: who were well qualified to do the work of the seminar, who were able and committed college teachers, and who would likely make the best contribution to the seminar (2).<sup>34</sup>

Aside from the technical requirements that candidates teaching in research-intensive universities were not eligible, nor were those with extensive publications, the NEH guidelines were quite flexible, allowing seminar leaders a fair amount of autonomy in choosing their seminarians—a point I think particularly important for the composition and rhetoric seminars. In response to the social and cultural shifts of the 1960s and '70s, the field was beginning to

develop in new directions, moving away from traditional humanistic study which tended to reify the social and cultural values transmitted through canonical literature, and toward new research that explicitly interrogated those values through research in such areas as basic writing, the new rhetoric, and the politics of language and literacy in an era of open admissions.

For example, in explaining his own criteria for selecting participants for his 1973 seminar, Gibson reported to the NEH that the primary question guiding his choices would be: “How effective is this teacher likely to be in taking back to his institution some new ways of doing his job, and in communicating these new ways to his colleagues?” (Seminar Description 3). While this question clearly resonates with the NEH’s interest in undergraduate teaching, Gibson pushes beyond that point by also suggesting that, all things being equal, he is particularly interested in candidates from the thirteen community colleges in Massachusetts—an interest that seems to evidence the field’s growing interest in basic writers and in what Gibson elsewhere calls “bi-dialectism.”<sup>35</sup> Other composition and rhetoric seminar leaders did not necessarily share Gibson’s criteria, yet many directors seem to have thought carefully about how to work within the NEH guidelines to accept into their seminars the kind of participants they wanted—a critical consideration given that many of the seminarians went on to be influential in the developing field.

Young, who led at least four NEH seminars on rhetoric and invention at Carnegie Mellon University, reflected on his own selection criteria, remembering that his choices were guided by a set of interrelated questions aimed at choosing seminarians who would not only be enjoyable to work with, but who would also be likely to participate in the professional growth of the field: Does the candidate look like she/he has an interesting mind? Are there signs of potential for publication? And, most importantly, does the candidate appear to be comfortable working on the

margins of a growing field (personal interview)? William E. Coles led at least three seminars on theories and practices of teaching writing at the University of Pittsburgh; although information on his selection criteria for his first seminar is not available, in later years he made a request to the NEH that his seminar be “restricted to a group of two year college teachers. I want another chance to work harder from the start at putting the participants in a position to say of themselves what the Philadelphia Phillies said of themselves that year they moved from fourth position to take the pennant: ‘Oh, yes we can’” (1980 NEH Summer Seminar Narrative Report 2). Wallace Douglas, who led a seminar on “Composition in the Rhetorical Tradition” at Northwestern University, commented on his own criteria for selection of participants, telling the NEH that in addition to their own guidelines: participants “should have some involvement with, or even better, responsibility for the first-year writing courses at their institutions. Special consideration should be given to those applicants from institutions with open admissions. It goes without saying, I suppose, that some degree of cultural diversity is to be sought” (1978 NEH Application 4). To varying degrees, these directors’ criteria for seminarians reflects not only the NEH’s commitment to improving humanities education at the undergraduate level, but composition and rhetoric’s growing range of intellectual investments and pedagogical commitments during a time when, as Young remembers, “there was a ‘pressure’ all around the country to grow rhetoric” (personal interview).

As we can see, the NEH guidelines for seminars, as well as for seminar leaders and participants, provided a set of enabling constraints for composition and rhetoric. Working within these constraints seminar leaders took advantage of the NEH’s interest in helping teachers “on the margins” develop content knowledge to take back to undergraduate teaching in their home institutions to help grow the field in some specific ways. As the pressure to “grow rhetoric”

energized the field, seminars (and seminarians) began to evidence interest in the social and cultural aspects of the teaching of writing that became so prevalent to the field in the 1970s and '80s, addressing issues of access, language politics, basic writers, writing processes, etc. In short, this partnership between the field and the federal government enabled the field to grow in particular dimensions that might not have otherwise been possible.

### *Knowledge and Pedagogy*

The NEH seminars provided the right opportunities at the right time for composition and rhetoric: just as the field was realizing it needed to professionalize beyond its reputation as a content-less service course, the NEH began funding seminars for scholars to research the field's expanding knowledge base. The productive relationship the seminars established between the NEH and composition and rhetoric provided a foundation for the new field, allowing it to professionalize as a humanistic discipline; however, our disciplinary literature does not reveal this important aspect of the seminars. Nor does our literature reveal much about the seminars offered during the fourteen years of NEH funding. According to Young, the NEH initiated the program for Summer Seminars for College and University Teachers, but they “really wanted *us* to tell *them* about appropriate seminars based on the growing edge of the discipline” (personal interview, my emphasis).

The authority positions within this discourse relationship (who was telling what to whom) are important in thinking about how the partnership between the field and the NEH created growth opportunities for the field, and helped guide the NEH's thinking about the discipline. So how, then, did Young—and the other seminar leaders—tell the NEH about the kinds of intellectual endeavors that were most critical for the growing discipline? How did they argue for

the “appropriate seminars” in a public and political climate that had thus far denigrated composition and rhetoric to a skills-based course requiring little or no disciplinary expertise to teach? To begin to answer these questions, I want to turn now to some of the few remaining primary materials that document the seminars as they were initially conceived and reported to the NEH; in other words, to the proposals seminar leaders submitted to the NEH, and to their subsequent correspondence, including final reports.

Despite the importance of the NEH seminars to the field’s expanding research and pedagogical commitments, very little has been written about them. Young’s yearlong seminar in 1978-79 is perhaps most well known, having become, according to Byron Hawk, “a foundational moment for the discipline” (21). Many of the participants in Young’s seminar went on to have illustrious careers, for which they offer significant credit to their work with Young and their fellow seminarians. One participant, Victor Vitanza, has gone so far as to say that the seminar “made my professional life” (Almagno 50).<sup>36</sup> Much of the work cultivated during this seminar yielded significant fruit for the developing field. For example, James Berlin and Robert Inkster collaborated on “Current-Traditional Rhetoric: Paradigm and Practice,” work that basically established the taxonomy Berlin used in his later research (Ede personal interview). In their germinal article, “Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked,” Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford report that “one of us [Ede] became interested in the concept of audience during an NEH Seminar” (167). Finally, Vitanza founded the journal *Pre/Text*, claiming that Young’s seminar “in part created the conditions for the possibilities of *P/T*. . . . When the NEH seminar came to an end and we all packed up to go our separate ways, I announced that I was going to start a journal. The response was ‘yes, that’s a good idea’” (*Introduction xvi-xvii*). Indeed, many “good ideas”

grew out of the work of the seminar, contributing to the growing discipline's expanding knowledge base and new pedagogies for the teaching of writing.

However, while the fruits of Young's seminar are in particular widely recognized within composition and rhetoric, and while a few scholars have written about its intellectual content (see Almagno and Hawk), much less is known about the relationship between the seminars in general and the NEH—about how the NEH framework shaped the seminars and vice versa. A good place to begin investigating this relationship is with the first composition and rhetoric summer seminar: Gibson's "Writing in the First College Years."

Given his lengthy career teaching at the undergraduate level (especially first-year composition), and his substantial work with teacher education, Gibson was a strong candidate to lead one of the initial NEH seminars.<sup>37</sup> His proposal for "Writing and Reading in the First College Years" clearly aligns with NEH goals in its emphasis on conducting individual and collective research aimed at improving undergraduate teaching.<sup>38</sup> Gibson's seminar description, which I will quote in full, makes these interdependent goals quite obvious:

This seminar concentrates on acts of composing—our own composing, our students' composing, and those compositions we call literature. Planned particularly for teachers in community and state colleges, it seeks to relate scholarship in linguistics, criticism, and even physical science with day-to-day activity in the freshman-sophomore English classroom. Issues about composing that the English teacher faces can be seen as parts of a whole—relations of language and experience, bi-dialectalism and usage, literary meaning, and "humanistic" approaches to teaching. The notion of language and style as play, with emphasis on irony and metaphor, will be aimed at encouraging attitudes



toward writing and reading that are more sophisticated and more flexible. The seminar will conclude with a study in depth of a single literary work, chosen by participating teachers and familiar to them in their teaching. In addition, participants will be expected to carry on independent research of their own, in British or American literature, using the resources of our new University Library.

(Face Sheet)

To facilitate the seminarians' growth as scholars and as teachers, Gibson situates the "day-to-day activity" in the English classroom within the scholarship shaping the growing field of composition and rhetoric, from literary studies to the politics of language and points in between. As he explains in a later description of the seminar used as promotional material by the NEH, the course was designed to strengthen the participants' teaching by working together to investigate the "intellectual or philosophical concerns that lie behind our classroom activity and that affect everything we do there" (NEH Summer Seminar for College Teachers of English np).

To give some idea of the interest the NEH seminars generated, for that first seminar, Gibson reports receiving almost 300 inquiries and over 100 completed applications. Based on the unanticipated number of applications, Gibson appealed to the NEH to expand his seminar from 10 to 12 participants. The seminarians Gibson ultimately accepted proposed a broad expanse of research topics, ranging from studying literary authors or tropes, to investigating theories of teaching writing, to constructing syllabi for writing classes for "under-skilled" students. The seminar met for several hours in the morning, four or five days a week (over eight weeks), organized around four interrelated areas of inquiry: relations of language to real experience, studies in style, "standards" in writing, and the study of a particular work in British or American

literature—preferably one that a majority of participants were familiar with through their own teaching.

In his final narrative report to the NEH, Gibson offers a limited summary of each class session. I will not reproduce that summary here, except to say it appears that in both name and in practice the seminar worked within the NEH's explicit (and implicit) guidelines to integrate intellectual study and pedagogical practice. In addition to broadening their own knowledge base through the study of a rigorous sequence of readings, seminarians considered how to apply their enhanced knowledge to their teaching: composing assignments for students, attempting to think through the terms of discourse through which one could (or should) organize a course in writing, and analyzing *Heart of Darkness* (the agreed upon final reading) for the purposes of discussing how to invite students into the book's central meaning.

Gibson concludes by addressing the NEH's request for him to comment "on the importance of the project as a contribution to the national interest in strengthening all aspects of the humanities" (np). Gibson responds to this concern by asserting a broad definition of literacy that exceeds instrumental concerns:

The teaching of writing in the first year or two of college is of course a central enterprise in American education, in spite of some recent attrition. It requires, however, new justification and new energy. No longer can we complacently argue that "good writing" (however defined) is indispensable to "success in life." Indeed there is reason to fear that in equating "writing" with "success," teachers may have been unwittingly supporting our society's least attractive aspects—the making of money, the defense of things-as-they-are, the persistence of social inequality and injustice. It would be a contribution to the national interest if

English teachers could be persuaded to see language in the largest possible social and political context. To do this without losing sight of our proven skills—the examination of rhetoric and style in detail—is the central challenge our profession faces. I see my part in this seminar as a tiny contribution in this direction, so that these experienced teachers of college composition will now at least be asking themselves, “Writing, yes, but writing for what?” (1975 *Final Report* np)

I have quoted Gibson at some length here because his response to the NEH’s query speaks directly to why writing and literacy are necessary humanistic endeavors, and to why and how they are rightly inflected by the cultural life of the public sphere (not just the academic classroom). Based on available materials, I cannot argue that Gibson chose to articulate his “contribution” in terms that echoed the Congressional debates I highlighted earlier, nor can I claim that his words here are indicative of intentional suasive strategies to forge stronger connections with the NEH. Nonetheless, I do think it important to recognize the ways in which Gibson *is* speaking to the concerns of the NEH, while still advancing an argument for the professionalization of literacy and writing studies. In framing his argument through the key concerns of the NEH, Gibson—intentionally or otherwise—is solidifying the field’s partnership with the NEH.

Young, too, worked with the enabling constraints of the NEH programmatic guidelines to advance the professionalization and disciplinary status of composition and rhetoric through his seminars. As Young asserted: “If composition [was] to have any hope of intellectual respectability, it [had] to have a more sophisticated theory than it had had up to the 1960’s” (personal interview). Young’s commitment to developing composition and rhetoric’s research and knowledge is consonant with the NEH’s interest in deepening humanistic study; moreover,

as the abstract for Young's first NEH proposal indicates, he brings his commitment to theoretical study to bear on undergraduate teaching. Young's proposal for that first, yearlong seminar, "Rhetorical Invention and the Composing Process" indicates three basic goals:<sup>39</sup>

An understanding of four modern methods of invention (classical invention; Burke's dramatistic method; Rohman's prewriting, and Pike's tagmemic discovery procedure); an understanding of their historical, rhetorical, and practical contexts, including various conceptions of the composing process and their implication; and an ability to conduct significant independent research in the most important of the rhetorical arts. The seminar will begin with lectures and intensive reading in the history and theory of rhetorical invention, with emphasis on the most important modern developments. During the remainder of the course, participants will present papers and lectures that probe fundamental features of the art and at the same time provide the theoretical basis for effective undergraduate courses in rhetoric. (Almagno 117)<sup>40</sup>

Of note in Young's description is his concluding emphasis on the course of study providing a "theoretical basis for effective undergraduate courses in rhetoric." Young framed his pedagogical emphasis even more emphatically in proposals for subsequent summer seminars. His proposals for his 1981 and 1983 seminars both indicate two primary goals that speak to the NEH's interests: "to enable the participants to become more effective teachers of a more effective rhetoric and to become independent inquirers into one of the most important of the rhetorical arts" (NEH Application Cover Sheets). Combining research with pedagogical investments was a strategic move on Young's part, given the NEH's program parameters to ensure that participants took their new subject knowledge back into their undergraduate classrooms.

As I noted above, one of the goals for the summer seminars was to bring teachers from smaller schools to larger institutions, to allow them to work with senior scholars and expose them to some of the cutting-edge research in their fields to strengthen their teaching. Equally important to the NEH was that the participants, in deepening their understandings of their subjects, would also deepen their ability to convey these new understandings to their students (8<sup>th</sup> *Annual Report*). The NEH was not explicitly interested in supporting pedagogical work; in fact, programmatic guidelines expressly prohibited pedagogically oriented seminars, by which I interpret the NEH to be against funding seminars devoted to curriculum development. However, given ongoing public conversations about the crisis in the humanities—and the need to provide opportunities and incentives for teachers (both those coming into the field and those already in the schools) to improve their competence through deeper study of their subject matter, many NEH officials were committed to the pedagogical implications of the Endowment’s mission. (*Commission 22*). And, as I have shown, Gibson and Young drew on the NEH’s privileging of knowledge over pedagogy in designing their seminars. Nonetheless, pedagogy played an important, if tacit, role in the seminars, a fact that—over time—helped the NEH develop a more capacious understanding of the interrelationship between knowledge and pedagogy in the work of composition and rhetoric.

### *Composition and Rhetoric for the People*

Young’s 1981 proposal also speaks to another of the NEH’s concerns; namely, making the humanities relevant in the eyes of the American public. Following the social and educational upheaval of the 1960’s, the humanities were no longer publicly valued in the way that they were when the NEH was first funded. By the late 1960s and into the 1970s, many universities shunted

aside traditional humanistic study in the interest of courses that would prove “relevant” to their students. These new courses often functioned to expose and critique existing cultural and social values, rather than clarifying and reinforcing them. The humanities, traditionally viewed as the epitome of academic elitism, divorced from any real use value, were downplayed. In order to make a case for continued appropriations, the NEH continually worked to articulate a vital social mission for the humanities. Young recognizes that concern in his proposal, writing that his own scholarly interests show a progression that

[r]eflects a deliberate effort to conduct a coherent, multi-faceted scholarly project over a number of years in a discipline that has not, on the whole, been notable for its scholarship. It is the result of an attempt to clarify in my own mind the dimensions of rhetorical scholarship, to develop skill in each, and to maximize the effectiveness and impact of my scholarly work. One would like his work to have made a difference to the discipline and to society. The question I have been addressing is how scholarly work is to be conducted to achieve these ends. The problem of long-term scholarly projects clearly related to educational and social needs might well receive some attention during the seminar, most probably when working with individual participants on their major project for the course. (5-6)

As Young make a case for the importance of strengthening disciplinary research and scholarship that addresses the educational and social needs of the country’s changing culture, he suggests that this work must also *make a difference to the discipline and to society*. Young is not proposing research simply for the sake of research. Rather, in responding to the NEH’s framework for the seminars, he argues the need both for disciplinary research that is responsive

to current educational and social needs, *and* for improving the effectiveness and impact of that research for a large audience.

Young is not alone in his suasive strategies; several seminar leaders adopted similar approaches in their proposals, highlighting the pedagogical implications of their seminars and suggesting a clear use value for those outside academe. For example, in his proposal for a NEH seminar on “Teaching Writing: Theories and Practices,” Coles described the course in terms that echoed the connection between intellectual study and pedagogical improvement that Gibson drew in his own seminar:

This seminar will have as its focus a substantive analysis of the current major approaches to the teaching of writing as represented by such writers as Macrorie, Winterrowd, Gibson, Sale, Lanham, and others. While not a course in teacher training, the seminar is designed to enable each participant to improve his pedagogical effectiveness by increasing his awareness of what it means to define writing, the writer, and the teacher of writing in different ways. All members of the seminar will be given the opportunity to complete a project having something to do with the teaching of writing in a form suitable for presentation at an NCTE or CCC Convention. Priority will be given to those demonstrating commitment to the teaching of writing as one of their central professional concerns. (NEH Summer Seminar Proposal Face Sheet)

Coles’ suggestion that increasing one’s awareness of what it means to define writing, the writer, and the teacher of writing in different ways will improve one’s pedagogical effectiveness is clearly reminiscent of the NEH’s commitment to seminars that will increase participants’ understanding of their subject, and their ability to communicate that understanding to their

students. Coles' proposal thus speaks to the NEH's interest in supporting scholarly pursuits as a way to enrich teaching. In his fuller course description, appended to his proposal, Coles makes a case for a seminar composed of participants "whose professional careers argue some kind of commitment to the teaching of writing as a discipline" (np). Not only does his argument subtly insist on the disciplinarity of the teaching of writing, but Coles suggests that a seminar of this kind is the best way that "the 'humanistic understanding' involved in seeing both writing and teaching of it as activities can best be transmitted to college students" (np).

Coles continues to work within the NEH's enabling constraints, namely, that seminars should allow participants to improve "their knowledge of the subjects they teach" (Addendum 2). He maintains that the best way to do so is to present writing and the teaching of writing as activities—as things one *does* more than things one *knows*. Coles' contention about writing and the teaching of writing as activities rather than knowledge thus speaks back to the NEH's explicit expectations for seminars to privilege research over pedagogy. Though he proposed a series of interrelated reading and writing assignments to frame his seminar, the central concern of Coles' course was for participants to work together in thinking about a range of answers to enduring questions such as the following:

Where do you begin with the teaching of writing? What do you move to and by means of what steps? What should students write about? What, that is, is a writing assignment? What's the difference between a good assignment and a bad one? What makes a good book on the subject of the teaching of writing? How do you use what you'd call a good book on the subject? How do you read a student paper? How do you read fifty of them? How do you mark what you read? What do you do in class with what your students write? How in a private conference do



you handle what a student has written? And above all, what sense do you invite your students to make of what you do with the subject of writing? Where do you want to come out with a writing course? Where do you expect your students to come out? (Addendum 7)

Coles asserts that imagining and evaluating a range of possible answers to the kinds of questions he posed as central to the work of the seminar is of crucial importance for teachers of writing. For this reason, Coles proposed that the final seminar project of preparing a paper suitable for conference presentation is meant to “invite [seminarians] to take a position from which to see how the ultimate benefit of professional activity can be pedagogical; how the real value, at least in this case, of consolidating one’s notions about the teaching of writing for an audience of strangers is to increase one’s effectiveness as a teacher” (Addendum 10). To locate oneself by taking a position alongside or against various pedagogical approaches to the teaching of writing is of lasting value, and one that seminarians could carry with them when they returned to their home institutions. In short, reading Coles’ communication with NEH officials reveals some interesting considerations about how the NEH cultivated seminarians’ expertise and scholarly ethos, and about how Coles then pushed his seminarians even further to consider how public interests in literacy education might inflect one’s expertise and scholarly ethos.

Coles’ interest in helping seminarians learn to articulate what they value about writing and the teaching of writing for “an audience of strangers” is an important, albeit largely unrecognized, aspect of the NEH seminars, in that they empowered participants to speak as experts in their subject. This function of the seminars, framed through a government initiative, is one of the ways that the NEH helped to shape the field by giving teacher/scholars an opportunity to claim an area of expertise and the discursive competency to talk about that work with multiple

stakeholders in literacy education, especially their students and colleagues. Many of the seminars, Coles' in particular, also helped participants learn to locate their intellectual and pedagogical commitments within public discourse about literacy education. In a follow up letter to Berlincourt, Coles reflects that the seminar's structure responded to the public controversy over "what is popularly known as 'the literacy crisis'" (2). To address this controversy with any degree of nuance, Coles suggests that as teachers of writing, we need to account for a number of related questions: "What is literacy? What does it mean to suggest that we are experiencing a crisis in it? And what's to be done to face it?" (2). In Coles' comments we can see an attentiveness to the public nature of literacy instruction, and the need to engage public perceptions of writing, students, and teachers in sophisticated ways. Like discussions about the crisis in humanities that provided the exigence for the NEH, Coles asks important questions about the function and use value of writing (instruction) for students (not just for academics). The NEH may not have initially shared Coles' interest in these matters, but it certainly gave him a forum for communicating his concerns with other teachers, and disseminating new disciplinary knowledge—and, as the archives make clear, the NEH listened to what Coles and the other seminar leaders had to say about the literacy crisis and how best to respond to it.

## **V. Reflecting on the (In)Tangible Effects of the Seminars in Going Public**

The NEH seminars in composition and rhetoric are, as I mentioned earlier, widely recognized for their contributions to the emerging field. The late 1970s was a "volatile time in composition studies," a moment remembered by Paul Kameen as one of "ideological intensity" (personal interview). The emergence of critical and cultural studies fed ideological battles within English, spilling over into composition and rhetoric's research into the writing process,

expressivism, basic writers, linguistic purity, and the new rhetoric. As composition and rhetoric gained recognition as a field, the NEH seminars helped solidify the discipline's intellectual boundaries. Led by senior scholars, the seminars legitimized the teaching and learning of writing as intellectual work and certified seminar participants (e.g., teachers lacking a publication record and research facilities at their home institutions) as scholars with something to contribute to the field.

Thirty-five years after participating in Young's 1977-78 NEH seminar, Lisa Ede credits her work with Young as integral to helping her "convert" from Victorian literature to the field of rhetoric and writing. In addition to the scholarly advancements that the year's study afforded her individually, Ede remembers that

[t]he seminar helped everyone to have more ambition and courage in their work—to think big. I remember this being an incredibly exciting time in that those of us in the seminar (and elsewhere) felt that we were in the process of helping to determine the disciplinary project of rhetoric and writing." (email interview)

Having this ambition and courage to purposefully shape the growing discipline is an important point, especially as she "left the seminar feeling much more empowered professionally—much more confident about my ability to speak knowledgeably both at my own institution and in public about writing and the teaching of writing" (personal interview). The ability to speak to multiple audiences and stakeholders about writing and the teaching of writing is a lasting benefit to Ede in her work as a textbook author, a writing teacher, and a writing program administrator. What I find important to recognize in Ede's account is the sense of ambition and courage to "think big" the seminar inspired, attitudes that helped her engage various publics through the everyday work of teaching and writing, rather than as a political activist for composition and rhetoric.

William L. Sipple participated in another of Young's NEH seminars, the 1983 summer seminar on "Rhetoric: Modern Developments in the Art of Invention." As with Young's first yearlong seminar, the central focus of the course was "on the new rhetoric and its applications to the teaching and learning of English" (Sipple personal interview). Sipple reports that the seminar was incredibly valuable in transforming his thinking on problem-solving rhetoric and invention—a transformation that subsequently affected how he approached his work as a teacher, as a department chair, and as a dean, in the design of writing curriculum. Sipple echoes Ede in crediting the seminar with enabling him to communicate with multiple public audiences and stakeholders about the teaching of writing, though Sipple took a different route. As Dean of the School of Communications and Information Systems at Robert Morris University, Sipple produced six years of Writing Across the Curriculum live videoconference for PBS Adult Learning Satellite Service (1991-1996).

Sipple explains that the series featured leaders in modern composition and rhetoric, program directors across the country, and projects nationally in schools, colleges, universities, communities, and businesses. For example, the first videoconference featured such scholars as Richard Young, Shirley Strum Kenny, Elaine Maimon, Susan McLeod, Jackie Jones Royster, Christopher Thaiss, Arthur Young, Toby Fulwiler, Anne Herrington, John R. Hayes, Linda Flower, William Zinsser, as well as programs at Spellman College, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, University of California Los Angeles, Clemson University, and Prince George's Community College. The PBS programs reached more than 30,000 professionals over a six-year period of programming, won numerous awards within the field, helped gain two FIPSE grants, and informed both professionals and the public about writing across the curriculum, modern rhetoric, and their place in curriculum and in life (personal interview). Clearly, Sipple's

experience as an NEH seminarian was foundational in his ability to “go public” in a major way, expanding the interdisciplinary and extracurricular reach of composition and rhetoric.

Reflecting on his choice to participate in Ann Berthoff’s 1980 seminar on “Philosophy and the Composing Imagination,” Paul Kameen remembers that he was looking for an intellectual home. The upheaval in English and cultural studies at that time was seismic; as Kameen puts it “the critical theory I studied in graduate school was irrelevant in about two years. Where was I going to go?” (personal interview). Like many scholars, Kameen was looking to reinvent himself in philosophical terms, to give him the sense that the way he was thinking about writing and the teaching of writing was not simply his own idiosyncratic approach. Kameen echoes other seminarians and scholars in claiming that Berthoff’s seminar became one of (if not the) primary influences shaping his career and scholarly projects:

I have a career to show for it that I may not have had otherwise. That NEH seminar is one of the most important things that made it possible for me to do everything I have done. There’s a memory of that seminar in everything I’ve written, and my vision of teaching at the classroom level, my work with students in specific ways. (personal interview)

One of the ways that Kameen credits the seminar for shaping his vision of teaching is that it helped him think about the classroom as the primary interface for composition and rhetoric to engage public constituencies: namely, our students. Bolstered by the work he started in Berthoff’s seminar, Kameen talks to his students about intellectual work, helping them understand it as a very practical part of their everyday lives.

If I’m successful, they’ll go out and do intellectual work in their professional lives. Where is the level of impact? I’ve taught thousands of people in those [first-

year composition] classes. They're out there in the same way I'm there because of that NEH seminar. They take these things out into the world. I see my contact with the public through my contact with these people that I'm accountable to.

(personal interview)

It would be unwise to generalize about the role the NEH seminars played in helping the hundreds of teachers who participated in them learn to articulate their theoretical investments and pedagogical commitments to multiple public audiences. However, based on the testimony of Ede, Sipple, and Kameen (not to mention Coles' description of the goals for his seminars), it does seem possible to posit that in shaping the nascent field, the seminars worked to provide the intellectual and pedagogical knowledge base that inspires the possibility to go public. At the very least, their reflections suggest lines of inquiry for continued research into the role of the NEH seminars and the different kinds of collaborative relationships created through their enabling constraints.

As I have shown, even as the NEH opened lines of communication with the federal government in order to obtain authorization for the foundation, composition and rhetoric scholars forged alliances with the NEH to take advantage of the opportunities it afforded. In short, the NEH provided certain enabling constraints within which seminar leaders proposed seminars and selected seminarians—activities that also functioned to educate NEH officials about cutting edge research in composition and rhetoric. While such activities helped build bridges between the field and the NEH, they also served another purpose: providing seminarians with lasting legacies, empowering them with the intellectual knowledge and confidence to articulate their theoretical investments and pedagogical commitments to the various publics intersecting with their professional lives.

**NEH Summer Seminars in Composition and Rhetoric, 1973-1987 (Figure 2)**

<b>University</b>	<b>Director</b>	<b>Year(s) &amp; Funding</b>	<b>Focus</b>
U of Massachusetts, Amherst	Walker Gibson	1973, \$40,420 1974, \$44,481 1975, \$41,480 1976, \$38,354	Writing in the First College Years  Seminar in English
U of Michigan, Ann Arbor (moved to Carnegie Mellon U with Young)	Richard E. Young	1977, \$44,184 1978, \$47,504 1981, \$70,000 1983, \$61,212	Rhetoric: Modern Developments in the Art of Invention
U of Nebraska, Lincoln	Dudley Bailey	1977, \$41,873 (\$43,165)	Aristotle's Rhetoric
U of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh	William E. Coles, Jr.	1977, \$41,212 (\$40,673) 1978, \$44,771 (\$2,400) 1979, \$48,171	Teaching Writing: Theories and Practices Literature/Language  Teaching Writing: Theories and Practices
U of Texas, Austin	James Sledd	1977, \$43,288 (\$44,145) 1978, \$29,233 (\$2,400) 1979, \$47,421  1981, \$70,000	Standard English: Social Control and Individual Freedom Literature  Standard English: Social Control and Individual Freedom Linguistics, Literacy, and the Politics of Education: Selected Instances, 1960-1980
U of Wisconsin, Madison	Lloyd F. Bitzer	1978, \$45,776  1980, \$60,999  1982, \$55,480 1983, \$55,241	Rhetoric, Argumentation, and Public Competence (interdisciplinary) Political Rhetoric, Argumentation, and Public Competence
Northwestern U, Evanston	Wallace Douglas	1978, \$45,998	Literature
U of Nevada, Reno	Robert M. Gorrell	1978, \$41,732 1980, \$46,368	Rhetoric and College Writing (interdisciplinary) Rhetoric and College Writing
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge	Wayne O'Neil	1978, \$49,573	Seminar in Linguistics
U of Chicago, Chicago	Joseph M. Williams	1978, \$42,394 1981, \$70,000 1985, \$56,783	Interdisciplinary Style and the Structure of Discourse

U of California, Los Angeles	W. Ross Winterowd	1978, \$42,890 1979, \$32,274 1982, \$53,024	Literary Criticism To explore the relationships between literary theory-criticism and literacy Literature and Literacy
U of Wisconsin, Madison	Germaine Bree	1979, \$56,185	Supports a summer seminar for college teachers in the fields of composition and rhetoric
Michigan State U, East Lansing	E. Fred Carlisle	1979, \$48,970	Supports a summer seminar for college teachers in the field of English
U of Massachusetts, Boston	Ann E. Berthoff	1980, \$60,000	Philosophy and the Composing Imagination
U of Illinois, Chicago Circle	Martin Steinmann, Jr.	1980, \$60,000	Speech Acts, Rhetoric, and Literary Criticism
Ohio State U, Columbus	Edward P.J. Corbett	1981, \$70,000 1987, \$65,365	Rhetoric and Public Discourse
U of Washington, Seattle	William F. Irmischer	1981, \$70,000	Contrastive Analysis of Various Approaches to Teaching Composition
U of California, Davis	James J. Murphy	1983, \$57,340	Ciceronian Rhetoric and Its Influence on Modern Writing
U of Wyoming, Laramie	John P. Warnock	1984, \$55,234	The Writing Process: A Humanistic View

Figure compiled from the *NEH Annual Reports*, 1973-1987. List of seminars, seminar titles, and funding amounts may not be complete or accurate due to inconsistencies in the NEH reports: for example, the 1978 Annual Report lists Richard E. Young as directing a seminar in "Rhetoric: Modern Developments in the Art of Invention" and a seminar in music. Some seminars are listed twice for the same year, with different funding amounts; for the sake of simplicity, I have indicated the second dollar amount parenthetically. Not all of the *Annual Reports* included full seminar titles; some are listed generically as "English" or "Interdisciplinary." In those cases, I have done my best to identify seminars in composition and rhetoric based on the director's place in the field.



*I knew that the knowledge successful teachers had gained through their experience and practice in the classroom was not tapped, sought after, shared, or for the most part, even known about. I also knew that if there was ever going to be reform in American education, it was going to take place in the nation's classrooms. And because teachers—and no one else—were in those classrooms, I knew that for reform to succeed, teachers had to be at the center. It became a burning issue with me that teachers were not seen as the key players in reform or as the true experts on what went on in their classrooms.*

~James Gray, *Teachers at the Center* (2000)

#### **4. Professional Development for Teachers: Making Practice Public The National Writing Project, 1974-present**

As we saw in the debates surrounding the founding legislation for the National Endowment for the Humanities, public conversations about education were inflected differently in the first half of the 1960s than they had been less than a decade before. Science and the humanities were viewed as complementary, even integrally related, fields of study, crucial to the development of well-rounded students capable of critical thinking and civic engagement. However, as the social, political, and economic upheaval of the late 1960s and early 1970s effected dramatic changes in higher education, public conversations about education changed tenor once again. The civil rights and affirmative action movements fomented seismic changes in the university: open admissions resulted in very different student demographics, with much more diversity in students' educational needs and prior experiences. These transformations resulted not only in significant shifts within the university itself, but also in public perceptions of academe. As Maureen Daly Goggin recounts, institutional changes “brought demands for relevancy in education that reoriented pedagogical practices in many places, shifting the focus more squarely onto the students,” especially the growing number of students who were underprepared for

college level writing, but who were admitted because of the radical reorganization of higher education (75).

One result of the seismic changes open admissions effected in higher education was that the early 1970s ushered in renewed public concerns about a national literacy crisis. The 1974 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported a decline in secondary students' literacy skills, especially in writing, since the last national assessment test five years earlier. The release of the NAEP data caught the media's attention, leading to "a series of articles and TV news stories that refocused attention on the problems of teaching reading and writing" (Goggin 75). Merrill Sheils sounded the alarm bells in her *Newsweek* expose on "Why Johnny Can't Write," reporting that "colleges and universities complain that many of the most intelligent freshman, in some ways more articulate and sophisticated than ever before, are seriously deficient when it comes to organizing their thoughts on paper" (59). Sheils' article is perhaps the most notorious, but it was far from the first or the last to proclaim a literacy crisis; popular discourse picked up Sheils' dramatic account of the problem, and posited the nation's declining literacy skills as the consequence of changing student demographics.

According to Mary Soliday, the crisis was also viewed more broadly within the social and political changes of the '60s:

Popular culture, permissiveness, progressive education, student rebellion, affirmative action, and a host of related reasons could explain the need for basic skills programs. For this reason, the rising number of basic skills courses could be seen solely as a response to the 'needs' of a new generation of students. (60)

Whether the cultural changes Soliday details were responsible for the so-called literacy crisis of the early 1970s is unclear. What is clear is that public concerns about the state of literacy

education were again a significant force for English teachers to combat. For example, one *Washington Post* article called out teachers for not knowing “how to teach [writing], even as it reported “a clamor about teaching writing mechanics” due in large part to the fact that student spelling and grammar were “political dynamite” within the public consciousness (Rich B5). As the media onslaught renewed public concerns about students’ declining literacy skills, pleas for teachers to stick to the basics resounded in the public sphere.

Thus, it was with a hostile spotlight on literacy education—and literacy educators—that James Gray launched the Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP) in 1974, an educational reform project that, as the epigraph to this chapter indicates, puts teachers squarely in the center as experts on their own teaching experiences and practices. In putting teachers at the center of educational reform, the BAWP worked productively and proactively to respond to public concerns about the literacy crisis by enriching communication between university faculty and K-12 teachers. One result of the BAWP’s opening lines of communication between educators of all grade levels is that it also facilitated collaborative interventions in mainstream discourse about students’ failing literacy skills, as educators articulated the BAWP mission and practices to outside stakeholders, including school administrators and the popular press.

The BAWP’s strategies for forging alliances between university faculty and K-12 teachers to address the literacy crisis worked to great effect. Nearly 40 years later, what is now known as the National Writing Project (NWP) continues to create lines of communication between educators of all levels and public stakeholders in literacy education. Gray’s “reform project” is a national network of nearly 200 local sites, each co-directed by faculty from local universities and K-12 schools. The NWP serves all fifty states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and is funded through federal monies, corporations,

foundations, universities and school districts. As the only federally funded project focused on the teaching of writing, its work is to build deep public understanding of literacy education through focusing on “the knowledge, expertise, and leadership of our nation's educators on sustained efforts to improve writing and learning for all learners” (NWP website). NWP sites follow the core mission of improving the teaching of writing by offering rigorous professional development programs for educators—at all grade levels and across the curriculum—in their service areas. Key to this professional development model are the invitational summer institutes in the teaching of writing, customized inservice programs for local schools and institutions led by NWP Teacher-Consultants, and continuing education and research opportunities for teachers (NWP website). The NWP serves over 3,000 teachers annually in its invitational summer institutes, and an additional 100,000 educators through inservice and professional development programs provided by local sites (Lieberman and Friedrich 2). According to the NWP’s *2010 Annual Report*, the project has reached over 12 million K-12 students since its inception.

Its longevity and productivity alone make NWP a notable force for literacy education, yet, for my purposes, more important than its statistics is the NWP’s history of addressing popular perceptions of literacy education through its emphasis on helping teachers make their teaching practices public. The NWP highlights making practice public because doing so recognizes teachers as agents of change who are crucial to real educational reform (the kind that starts inside the classroom rather than at the level of policy). Public concern about the quality of students’ writing is a perennial feature of discourse about education in this country, but the NWP has helped change that discourse by educating multiple constituencies about the uses and importance of writing both within and outside the classroom (NWP and Nagin 1). NWP teachers learn to speak to multiple stakeholders about the value of and best practices for a rich literacy

education at all grade levels and across the curriculum, thus providing a valuable model for composition and rhetoric as the field works to reframe public perceptions of student writers and writing instruction.

I am interested, then, in the strategies and practices the BAWP used to respond productively to the reported literacy crisis of the early 1970s. What strategies did the BAWP use to address public concerns about teachers' inadequacies and students' declining literacy skills, and how does the NWP now draw on those strategies to make itself heard in an educational culture increasingly dominated by assessment driven mandates for improvement? How did the BAWP articulate its beliefs about writing and writing instruction to various stakeholders, and how does the NWP do so today? How has it leveraged its fundamental philosophies about writing, teaching, and learning to build partnerships with teachers, administrators, school districts, universities, foundations, and the federal government?

To address these questions, I begin with a brief history of the BAWP, paying close attention to the central tenets of the project that serve as the core of all local sites. Drawing on personal interviews conducted in the Spring of 2012 with Sharon Washington, Executive Director; Richard Sterling, former Executive Director; Judy Buchanan, Deputy Director; and Elyse Eidman-Aadahl, Director of National Programs and Site Development, I consider some of the rhetorical strategies and practices the BAWP leveraged to speak to multiple stakeholders in literacy education and look at how those strategies and practices are enacted by the NWP today. In my analysis of these key strategies, I reflect on their similarities and differences to the strategies used by Project English and the NEH seminars and consider what we can learn from them to guide disciplinary engagements with multiple publics in our current rhetorical contexts.

## I. Revolutionizing Reform

As I discussed in Chapter 1, composition has long been linked with remedial education. Public emphasis on remedial writing instruction has waxed and waned in response to debates about students' declining literacy skills and the purpose and efficacy of higher education. The City University of New York was the first major university system to institute an open admissions policy, and, as a result, discourse around remedial writing instruction—now known as basic writing—tended to focus on CUNY and New York City as the ground zero of literacy debates (Horner). For example, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a piece by Thomas Wheeler, a CUNY teacher, on “Why Johnny Can’t Write.” Even as Wheeler cautions that not open admissions but rather the “mechanization of public school education” is to blame for students' poor literacy standards, he draws attention to the fact that nearly half of all CUNY's entering freshman had to take remedial writing classes (D11). Indeed, even within composition and rhetoric studies, scholars often associate the dominant public discourse about remedial writers and higher education in the 1970s with CUNY's open admissions policy (if only because Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*, written when she was teaching there, was so foundational for composition studies as it was beginning to constitute itself as a discipline).

The perceived literacy crisis of the early 1970s was not, however, geographically restricted to the east coast. John Trimbur contends that the discourse of crisis sweeping the country in the mid-1970s was particularly acute for the rising middle-class, as the decline in literacy skills “appeared to deprive the schools of a fundamental measure to rank students in a meritocratic order, to certify the success of *their* children, and to legitimate the unequal outcomes of the others—the minorities, the poor, and the working class” (278-279). In other words, middle-class parents suspected their children were unfairly evaluated in comparison to those

students who arrived on campus unprepared for college level writing, courtesy of open admissions, civil rights, and affirmative action.

On the other side of the country, the University of California system was increasingly agitated about the literacy skills of the state's high school graduates. At its flagship campus, UC Berkeley, faculty and administration were aware that although the university was drawing its freshmen students from the top 12.5 percent of California's high school graduates, nearly half of those "top" students were entering the university unprepared for the writing that would be expected of them (Gray 45-46). *Time* magazine reported that nearly fifty percent of incoming students flunked the Subject A entrance exam, requiring them to take a "remedial course known around the campus as 'Bonehead English'" (Stone 138). The more damning statistic, according to the *Time* article, was that most of those "remedial" students had attended good high schools, and earned B's if not A's in their English classes. For Berkeley, the dire statistics regarding students' literacy skills meant that the time was ripe for innovation, as university administrators looked for ways to respond to the crisis.

The Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP) was one such innovative response. James Gray, a long time high school English teacher and English supervisor in Berkeley's School of Education's Teacher Education Division, saw the lack of communication between teachers in secondary and higher education as one of the root causes of California's literacy crisis. To solve this problem, he proposed the BAWP to get university faculty and classroom teachers to begin to talk and work together to solve the literacy crisis, and, in so doing, he initiated a K-16 partnership that did not often occur at the time (46). The BAWP thus began as a groundbreaking response to public concerns about students' declining literacy skills and the teaching of writing across California's schools.

Gray purposefully revolutionized many traditional ways of educating teachers as he developed the BAWP. He recounts that he was disturbed by the usual reform efforts that envisioned teacher development as a hierarchical structure, requiring teachers to receive the expert advice of university faculty and administrators—who often had little idea about what goes on in the classroom. In other words, teachers’ knowledge and experience was not often recognized save perhaps for those teachers labeled as “experts.” A few professional development programs, such as those administered by the NEH or the NDEA Summer Institutes, aimed to serve those expert teachers by having them learn from the “real” experts, e.g., university faculty. The typical model in these programs was a fairly traditional seminar based on the research interests of the seminar leader, where teachers were expected to learn the content matter rather than to explore their own questions and concerns about teaching. Other than programs such as the NEH’s or the NDEA’s, few professional development opportunities existed for teachers beyond mandated inservice sessions in the local schools.

In developing the BAWP as a response to California’s literacy crisis, Gray did not want to repeat the all-too-common mistake of failing to recognize teachers’ expertise. He tried to imagine a different kind of professional development structure that would disrupt mainstream practices under the premise that valuing teachers’ professional expertise would productively inflect their classroom practices, and thereby reform literacy education. Gray remembers that

I thought about all the successful teachers I knew who were doing inspiring work behind the closed doors of their classrooms, and I contemplated the potency of a structure that would allow these teachers to share the theory and strategy of their best practices and then make this knowledge available to others, including the beginning teachers I was working with. (47)



Based on Gray's desire to upend the traditional "reform" structure, the writing project offered innovative opportunities to bring together a diverse group of teachers to develop professional communities, to become leaders within those communities, and to talk across institutional borders—all new opportunities within education (Buchanan telephone interview; Sterling Skype interview).

UC Berkeley was, of course, concerned by the latest "literacy crisis" demonstrated by discouraging Subject A exam scores. Gray took his plan to Berkeley's Assistant Dean, John Matlin, who, seeing Gray's plan as a critical mode of response to the literacy crisis in the University of California system—one of the few put forward with the potential to reverse the decline—arranged release time for Gray to get started on the project. "We were filling a need," Gray writes, "so it happened that, from the beginning, the Bay Area Writing Project was recognized and supported by UC Berkeley's top levels of administration: the provosts and deans of Letters and Science and the professional schools, and the dean and assistant dean of the School of Education" (47). With the help of his colleagues, Albert "Cap" Levin, a high school English teacher in Marin County, and Bill Brandt, professor of rhetoric at Berkeley, Gray began planning the first invitational summer institute—to be held in the summer of 1974.

As Gray and his colleagues imagined the invitational summer institute, they planned for it to bring together a community of teachers at all grade levels and across the curriculum to pursue sustained inquiry into the teachers' own questions about writing and the teaching of writing, rather than to be lectured to by university experts.<sup>41</sup> Within this community of inquiry, three critical components of the summer institute would be instantiated: 1) teachers would write and revise with the help of a writing group, 2) teachers would take turns providing teaching demonstrations, which the group would then reflect on as case studies from which to make

knowledge about writing and the teaching of writing, and 3) teachers would go back to their home institutions to lead inservice sessions for their colleagues based on the BAWP model. Nearly 40 years later, these fundamental aspects of the first BAWP summer institute remain at the core of the NWP's work today.

## **II. Opening Lines of Communication, Engaging Multiple Perspectives**

In the interviews I conducted with national leaders of the NWP, all four talked about the importance of helping teachers construct a professional ethos to legitimize their engagements with outside stakeholders in literacy education. Supporting teachers in interrogating their practices through multiple perspectives provides a warrant for teachers to make persuasive arguments about why writing and writing instruction matter. Though the NWP's practices for helping teachers learn to articulate their practices to various publics have evolved over the years, their genesis builds from the strategies Gray used to conduct the first BAWP summer institute. In this section, then, I want to explore some of those strategies as they were first instantiated in 1974; in a later section, I will consider how they have evolved today through the NWP's continued public engagements in discourse about literacy education.

### *Upending Hierarchical Models*

Gray's desire to upend traditional reform efforts and to facilitate communication between university faculty and classroom teachers led to what was perhaps his most revolutionary strategy for the BAWP: that it would be co-directed by an academic in the field of writing (a field that at the time was just beginning to be recognized *as* a field) and by a K-12 teacher of writing. Within these initial ideas for the BAWP's summer institute, we can see some significant

distinctions between Gray's model and the traditional model privileged by the NEH and the NDEA. The BAWP model imagined a non-hierarchical community of teachers working to co-create knowledge, with an emphasis on pedagogy and practice. Asking teachers to think about writing—and what it means to teach writing—was an important, if tacit, response to the mainstream discourse of crisis because it enabled teachers to think about how they could best articulate their own values and experiences within the rhetorical contexts in which they were teaching.

Supporting teachers in research and inquiry into writing and the teaching of writing was especially important at the time, as few (if any) elementary or secondary teachers were required to take a course in the teaching of writing (Gray 49). At the same time, even as teachers were training themselves through the trials and errors of their classroom work to teach writing, composition and rhetoric was developing a large body of disciplinary scholarship. Gray recalls that it was

...important to us that teachers learn about changes in the field of teaching writing. In the early 1970s, there was an emerging body of knowledge from research and from the classroom practice of successful teachers. While we were beginning to know more than we had ever known before about writing and the teaching of writing, many classroom teachers, working as they do behind the closed doors of their classrooms, knew little about these developments and had no easy way of becoming informed. We knew that a familiarity with the work of Francis Christensen, James Moffet, and Ken Macrorie, for example, would help them think about their practice. (48)

However, unlike other professional development programs for teachers, the BAWP's vision for acquainting teachers with composition and rhetoric scholarship was not intended solely for the purpose of filling a void in teachers' knowledge of their subject matter. Rather, such work was meant to help teachers establish a dialogic inquiry, so that they could use the scholarship to reflect on their practice—and vice versa.

### *Teachers as Writers*

Much of the work of building lines of communication between teachers and university faculty within the summer seminar was accomplished through the writing component, as they worked together to experience and enhance their own writing practices. The sustained time and intense focus on their own writing allowed teachers to develop as *writers* and as *teachers of writing*. The process allowed teachers to remember how learning happens, to experience writing as a process, and to reconceptualize revision as a dynamic re-thinking of the piece—all of which complemented and/or challenged what they were learning about composition research through their group inquiry.

Three or four afternoons a week, teachers met in small writing groups to discuss their own writing in whatever way seemed most productive for the group. Teachers were given the freedom to write about whatever topic(s) they liked, the only “requirement” was a suggested structure: to write and revise four major pieces. The first three were on a single topic, but written from three distinct approaches or in three different genres, which invited experimentation and guaranteed the writer a varied writing experience—thus also serving as a model for student writers (Gray 85). The last piece was on writing or the teaching of writing, such as a personal position paper, an article, or a writing policy statement for their school or department (Gray 76).

The writing sequence, then, was another BAWP strategy to prepare teachers to articulate what they knew—and were learning—as literacy educators, as they gained the expertise and authority that came from their own experiences. The writing component became integral to the BAWP’s mission to prepare teachers to be agents of change because, as Gray puts it, “[the teachers] rise to a new level: when they leave the institute, they’re teachers of writing *who are also writers*” (85). Identifying themselves as writers empowered teachers in the classroom. Not only did self-identifying as writers compliment the research aspects of their work, but it also gave them an increased understanding of writing as a process and as a means of learning. Finally, integrating this new knowledge into their teaching provided a better understanding of their students’ struggles with writing, and how sharing one’s writing with a community of fellow writers can mitigate those struggles.<sup>42</sup>

### *Teachers Teaching Teachers*

The teaching demonstration, an integral component of the summer institute, likewise evolved out of the BAWP’s desire to equip teachers to be leaders in their own profession; at the same time, it can also be viewed as an important response to public discourses of literacy crisis. Each participant in the summer institute demonstrated an approach to teaching writing that they found effective in their own classroom. The goal of the demonstrations was not to share or prescribe “best practices,” but to present a case study, as it were, for teachers to discuss in light of both their ongoing inquiry and their own teaching practices. Teaching demonstrations thus provided opportunity for dialogue and continued research, not simply the exchange of approved curricula.

The teaching demonstrations required teachers to be open to critique that, while meant to be supportive, could still cause discomfort. As Joseph McDonald, Judy Buchanan, and Richard Sterling so aptly point out, “reform” at any level—even, or perhaps especially, at the level of one’s own writing and teaching practices—puts practitioners’ beliefs and habits up for question. “This is [reform’s] fundamental dynamic,” they write. “It aims to displace conventional beliefs and habits with new ones, but old beliefs and habits may be deeply ingrained, tacitly held, comfortable, even useful for reasons the reformers might now appreciate. They are, therefore, very difficult to displace” (82). Un-interrogated teaching practices, even if they appear successful, are little more than formulas—yet it is all too easy to stop questioning one’s teaching in the midst of getting through the business of the day. Taking the risk of sharing their writing and teaching requires teachers to interrogate their own habits and beliefs, and to open themselves up to collegial critique and collegial learning (McDonald et al 96). One of the payoffs of this risk-taking is that it immediately positions teachers to make their practice public within the relatively safe space of the institute, with the mutual support of their peers.

Teachers were given the freedom to determine the content for their demonstrations, which meant that over the course of the institute teachers were exposed to a variety of approaches and methods for teaching writing, rather to trying to codify “the” BAWP approach to teaching writing. In Gray’s words, “[t]he writing project is not a writing curriculum or even a collection of best strategies; it is a structure that makes it possible for exemplary teachers to share with other teachers ideas that work” (84). Most importantly, that sharing of ideas created a space for dialogue and inquiry, to reflect on how or why what worked for one teacher with one group of students might not work—or work differently—for another teacher or another group of students.

The practice of dialogue and inquiry served an important role in the institute, as it enabled teachers to think critically about their individual and collective responses to the literacy crisis. Teachers came from a variety of backgrounds and teaching situations, and their classroom needs were likewise varied. Rather than being handed a new curriculum to solve the literacy crisis, teachers worked together to think dialogically about multiple practices and how those practices might be inflected differently depending on the students in one's classroom. The teaching demonstrations thus enabled teachers to build a repertoire of flexible approaches that valued writing as a process that promotes learning, especially when students are offered a wide range of writing opportunities at all grade levels, and across the curriculum.

### *Taking the BAWP into the Schools*

One component of the BAWP—facilitating inservice sessions at local schools—got off to a rocky start, according to Gray, but over the years it has nonetheless proved integral to the project's interest in building bridges of communication between literacy educators at all levels. As I noted earlier, Gray reports that professional development workshops during this time period typically meant that outside experts (usually university faculty) would lecture teachers on “best practices,” delivering their expert knowledge to an audience whose attendance was mandatory.<sup>43</sup> Not surprisingly, teachers were often unenthusiastic at being forced to attend a session where someone with very little classroom familiarity lectured at them (one reason why, as I noted above, Gray's reform efforts focused on upending traditional academic hierarchies). Following the first summer institute, the BAWP started to receive requests to lead workshops and inservice sessions in the schools; however, the administrators issuing such requests expected the typical format. Gray reports that such sessions consistently failed in the face of resistance from the

teachers in attendance. It was not until the BAWP developed its *own* inservice model—based largely on the nonhierarchical format of its summer institute—that their sessions found a more enthusiastic reception.

In the trial and error of the failed inservice sessions, Gray and his colleagues learned to refuse requests for required professional development; they would only facilitate sessions for teachers who wanted to be there (64). Similarly, they learned that the best sessions were those that invited the teachers to participate as co-creators of knowledge rather than as passive recipients. Honoring teachers as experts in their own practices and teaching environments encouraged them to participate in the inquiry Gray and his colleagues tried to facilitate through their inservice sessions. Given the opportunity to talk with their colleagues about writing and the teaching of writing, to experiment with different teaching practices by doing the writing that students would do and then reading their writing to others, teachers began to talk with their colleagues across grade levels and subject matter about the BAWP inservice classes. “And so,” in Gray’s modest formulation, “it began” (66). The BAWP began to gain public attention as a mitigating force against California’s literacy crisis.

### *Spreading the Word*

With the successful completion of the first few summer institutes, the BAWP worked strategically to gain support from multiple public stakeholders (beyond those from Berkeley and the local school districts). Teachers and administrators across California began to take notice of the BAWP, generating attention both within the teaching community and in the media. In a striking discursive change from earlier reports of the literacy crisis, media reports of the BAWP accurately characterized its mission and its practices. In June of 1977 the *Los Angeles Times* ran



a lengthy article about the BAWP with the catchy headline, “Teaching Teachers—a Hot Item,” praising the project as a successful intervention in California’s K-16 literacy education. The positive press on the BAWP model for teaching teachers was a far cry from the crisis discourse criticizing students’ literacy skills—and positioning teachers as the problem—that had been so dominant just a few years earlier. The *Times* Education Writer, Don Speich, cited a number of people involved in the project, characterizing its “seemingly irresistible appeal to educators,” as evidenced by its growth from the simple beginnings (and modest university budget) of the 1974 BAWP invitational summer institute. Only three years later, the project had spread to include colleges, universities, and school districts across California, and was set to cross state borders into Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Wisconsin, Virginia, New York, South Carolina, and Arizona (D1).

Speich appears to have understood the BAWP mission as Gray and others explained it, for he does not posit that the BAWP is simply the latest in a series of curricular efforts marketed as the magic bullet for solving the literacy crisis. In fact, he explicitly tells his readers that the BAWP offers no formula for the teaching of writing. “Rather,” he writes, “it stages workshops at which teachers are exposed to numerous approaches to composition and then left to choose the one which might work best for them” (D1). He adds significant texture to that synopsis, however, with an anonymous quote. “Said one new believer in the project, only half jokingly: ‘The Bay Area Writing Project is one part seminar, one part therapy and one part religious experience’—a statement which underscores the zealous commitment to the program of those associated with it” (D1).<sup>44</sup> The evangelical language of this “new believer” is tempered in the rest of the article by Speich’s careful analysis of not only the claims of success made by Gray

and others associated with the project, but also the limitations suggested by inconclusive studies on the project's impact on student achievement.

Speich's article is significant because it demonstrates the growing public awareness of and positive interest in the BAWP, a trend that continued to disrupt the usual crisis rhetorics for nearly a decade as national newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* published similarly laudatory articles. These articles, all of which quote writing project teachers at some length, generally support the BAWP as an effective—and revolutionary—program in teachers' professional development and classroom practice. For example, James Lardner's "The Rebirth of Writing: The Projects That Are Helping Johnny Put It Down on Paper Again," cites Donald Gallehr, Associate Professor of English at George Mason University, who says that the BAWP model is "a radically different way of approaching education... It's common sense, but it was never done this way before. We work with teachers who have been part of a repressive and suppressive system for years, and we see them break out of that on a regular basis" (B1).<sup>45</sup> As it went public in the nation's press, Gray's revolutionary reform became an accepted model for enriching teachers' teaching practices, and helped move mainstream discourse away from the crisis rhetorics of "Why Johnny Can't Write," and toward a more nuanced discussion of the purposes for and practices of a rich literacy education.

Summarizing the BAWP model, Lardner echoes the missionary tone of Speich's "new believer," claiming that "the project aims to create a cadre of reborn writing enthusiasts who, inside their own schools, will become evangelists for the new faith and be fruitful and multiply" (B1). Despite the questionably ironic tone of such language, articles on the BAWP during this time suggest that the project was making headway in reframing the mainstream discourse around teachers as the root cause of students' declining literacy skills. Rather than targeting teachers as

the problem, these articles reflect a more nuanced understanding of writing as a means of learning, the importance of teaching writing across the curriculum and at all grade levels—and the need to support teachers in developing successful classroom practices for doing so. The positive national press directed public attention to the writing project as a viable model for mitigating to the crisis in literacy education, making the BAWP visible and attractive in the public eye. Thus the seeds were sown for growing the NWP.

### **III. From “Radical Fringe” to Accepted Practice**

As the BAWP became a visible model of revolutionary professional development in the national press, it was also recognized as a *transportable* model of how partnerships between university faculty and classroom teachers could revolutionize the teaching of writing at all grade levels and across the curriculum. As Ann Lieberman puts it, the writing project model proved “teachers could become involved in their own development and how a community of learners could be mobilized as part of a school-university partnership” (“Commitment and Competence” 188). The idea of putting teachers at the center of their professional development—an idea that seemed so revolutionary at the beginning—was gaining traction as the BAWP model proved successful. I will not trace here the chronological or geographical spread of local writing sites, from a grass-roots endeavor to a national network; instead, I want to look at how the project garnered public support not only by gaining foundation and federal funding to build a national infrastructure, but also at how the network maintained integrity in its core values and principles.

### *Establishing Financial Partners*

With the legitimacy afforded by several years of the BAWP's summer institute, the crucial next step was to find outside monies to supplement university funding—to grow the project beyond what Berkeley's modest budget could support. Gray recalls that his initial attempts to secure additional funding for the BAWP resulted in failure. Prior to the 1974 summer institute, Gray wrote eight grant proposals to foundations identified by UC Berkeley's Sponsored Projects office. None were successful. "I was seeking funding for a project that had not yet begun, had not been tested, and had not been fine-tuned in any way. This derring-do was not lost on the reviewers," Gray writes. Amongst the rejections was one from the NEH, which based its refusal on the grounds that "writing is not a part of the humanities!" (Gray 61).

Over the next few years, with the assistance of Alden Dunham, program officer at the Carnegie Corporation of New York—and with the evidence of a proven track record to support their requests—Gray and his colleagues learned how to craft the budget and evaluation sections for successful grant proposals (Gray 61). They went back to the NEH, and in 1976 the Endowment provided a grant to establish eight writing project sites in California, as well as three sites in other states: each site received \$15,000 from the NEH, which required a one-to-one match in funds ("Commitment and Competence" 188). Why the NEH reversed its position on writing as part of the humanities is unknown, but it seems reasonable that Walker Gibson's NEH seminar on "Writing in the First College Years" during the intervening years may have contributed to the Endowment's new determination.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the NEH Summer Seminars for College and University Teachers affected new understandings of the role of literacy education within the humanities; certainly, such changing views must have inspired new commitments within the

NEH administrative policy. Whatever the reasons for the NEH's change of heart, it is certain that over the years it came to view the writing project as an exemplary model. Gray remembers that their 1984 NEH grant was accompanied by words of praise from John Hale at the Endowment: "As for the character of the work, I have no hesitation in saying that the National Writing Project has been by far the most effective and cost-effective project in the history of the Endowment's support for elementary and secondary education programs" (qtd in "Reminiscing" np). No longer a marginal experiment, but a recognized success, in the following years the writing project continued to secure foundation and institutional funding, as well as generating an income through fee-for-service professional development inservice sessions in local schools, to help grow the project into a network of sites.<sup>46</sup>

### *Forming the Network*

The network is a critical aspect of the writing project because unlike many programs, the core principles of the BAWP model remained intact (rather than becoming diffused) as new local sites were established. The local sites built alliances between universities and school districts across the country, publicizing the writing project's successes and maintaining belief in the professional expertise of teachers. The NEH grants allowed the new sites to be networked through the California Writing Project, predicated on the same philosophies that exist today in the National Writing Project. The network is

[a] federation of independent and locally administered writing project sites based on the Bay Area Writing Project model and program design and held together by common philosophy, goals, and basic assumptions and by the glue of networking

provided initially by the Bay Area Writing Project and later by the greatly expanded networking programs of the National Writing Project. (Gray 116-117)

Each site operates independently within the local contingencies of the areas it serves, from forging community alliances with museums, libraries, arts organizations and local and state literacy councils to offering workshops for young (student) writers to writing groups for veterans to experiments in digital composition (St. John and Stokes 32, NWP website). At the same time, each site shares certain constituent features: a co-directorship shared by a university faculty member and a K-12 teacher, yearly invitational summer institute, inservice activities, and continuity programs to help teachers continue their professional development over the years (rather than through a single summer seminar). The flexibility of this network allows local sites to respond to the needs of the teachers they serve—needs that might be very different in an urban site than in a rural site, for example—while still maintaining fidelity with the core principles of the writing project.

This flexible and networked affiliation between sites has allowed the project to grow in unexpected ways, including paving the way for federal appropriations in 1991—a process that was initiated not by Gray, but by the Mississippi Writing/Thinking Institute. In 1985, Mississippi State University professor Sandra Burkett started the first writing project site in Mississippi; after that first summer institute, the project almost immediately started branching out across the state. “I went everywhere they’d let me,” Burkett remembers, “and talked about the project” (qtd in Gray 119). By the following year, two new sites at Southern Mississippi University and Delta State University were established and the state network slowly began to consolidate—with, as Burkett says, a lot of conversations and negotiations with multiple stakeholders:

Here's where the behind-the-scenes work was most important...meeting with school superintendents, teachers, PTA members, school administrators, foundation people, anyone who wanted to support us. We worked hard to be sensitive to the politics of our state, waiting to declare ourselves a network until the jewel—Ole Miss—had joined us. (qtd in Gray 119)

In this way, the writing project relied on each site to work with their affiliate university to reach out to its community, prompting discussions about literacy at the local level rather than exclusively on a national scale. The collaborative network of seven sites that ultimately became the Mississippi Writing/Thinking Institute is significant in the history of the NWP because the web of relationships—established through the institute and spreading out across the state—resulted in federal support.

When tracing the circuitous path the writing project traveled on its way to obtaining federal funding, it is important to remember that Gray did not seek those appropriations. Instead, the network of teachers—educated through local writing project sites to make their practice public—grew strong enough that some of them from the Mississippi site were able to initiate conversations with state and federal legislators. Sherry Swain, a first-grade teacher and a summer fellow at the first institute at Mississippi State University, had connections through her father with someone at the state capital—a social network that allowed Burkett and Swain to present their work to the Senate Education Subcommittee. Serendipitously, Swain also discovered that Anne Cherry, education aid to Thad Cochran, the Republican United States Senator from Mississippi, was one of Burkett's former students. With Cherry's support, Cochran became interested in the NWP, and was a receptive audience by the time Burkett, James Gray, and Don Gallehr, director of the Northern Virginia Writing Project, met with him (Gray 120). Between

the enthusiasm of NWP teachers, classroom evidence, and the slow but steady growth of the network since 1974, Cochran found the early success of the NWP compelling. Along with Mississippi's Democratic Representative, George Miller, Cochran introduced federal legislation for a \$2 million appropriation in 1991.

### *Using Government Requirements for Self-Directed Growth*

A direct appropriation from the federal government certainly signaled the NWP's "arrival" as a significant force for literacy education—and as an exemplary model of productive communication between writing teachers and public stakeholders. There are two key, interrelated aspects of the legislation, however, that are particularly significant in light of the project's sustained commitment to advocating for literacy education: the way the NWP used the strings attached to federal funding to refine its own practices, and the NWP's instantiation of the writing project model into law. The strings attached to the federal appropriations for the NWP are not surprising. After all, as Sterling points out, funding always comes with strings, and working within the constraints of those "strings" requires a kind of dance with the people writing the checks (Skype interview). In this case, the NWP used the strings attached to federal funding to create a national organizational infrastructure, including establishing non-profit status, stricter accounting procedures, and mandated yearly assessments of local sites (Eidman-Aadahl telephone interview). While these new procedures could be considered constraining, the NWP instead used them as an opportunity for self-evaluation, to ensure that local sites were maintaining a fidelity to the core philosophies even as they developed new approaches to meet the needs of their own constituencies; in short, they agreed to meet the federal requirements, but did so to serve their own purposes.



Sterling reports that during his tenure as Executive Director, a group of directors evaluated every site on an annual basis to make sure they were adhering to the model: a yearly summer institute, teacher demonstrations, getting teachers writing, etc. A group of directors read renewal proposals each year. When problems arose, they were referred to another team of people who would determine whether they were eligible for funding; whether they had to go on probation; or whether they had to receive a site visit from the national organization. “We would go there and argue with them,” Sterling says. “If you want the money, this is what you have to do.” The strict accountability to the model meant that each year, a few sites were defunded—which, not incidentally, stood the NWP in good stead with the federal government, because once having secured federal funding, no one ever defunds anything (Skype interview).

The result of the NWP’s strategies for working with (rather than resisting) the government’s strings, according to Lieberman, is that the NWP has become a significant player in both literacy and professional development circles. Lieberman claims “the federal connection has also pressed the NWP into ratcheting up its accountability mechanisms, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data on student achievement. In the process, the NWP has shifted from being a cottage industry to a full-fledged national network...” (“Commitment and Competence” 199). At the same time, even as the federal funding consolidated the NWP’s organizational procedures at the national level, the project continued to operate in non-hierarchical fashion—that is, at the local sites rather than at the national office.

From the “base” of the local sites, the NWP builds upwards to the national office, which, at least in theory, exists to support—not direct—the work of the local sites (Washington telephone interview). The relationship between local sites and the national organization is important because, as Lieberman points out, “[u]nlike other organizations, the writing project

work and the socialization of the participants into the culture all happen at the local level” (“Commitment and Competence” 194). Teachers are acculturated in the writing project model at their local site, and, for most teachers, it is where they learn what it means to belong to a community of professionals. Ensuring that local sites adhere to the model is thus one way the national organization helps maintain an internal coherence across writing projects, based on the communal commitment to facilitating communication between literacy educators of all levels and subjects in the interest of improving writing instruction in our nation’s schools.

The second significant strategy the NWP used to establish a successful relationship with the federal government—one that is directly related to the project’s use of the funding “strings”—is that the writing project model was written into law. Sterling recalls that “we were fierce about protecting the model,” and one of the best protections was to instantiate the model in the legislation (Skype interview). Federal legislation for direct funding meant the writing project was recognized on its own terms, with federal support to carry out its mission as the NWP conceived it. Competitive foundation funding, on the other hand, rested on the writing project’s ability to represent itself as a project sufficiently similar to those meeting the priorities of private funders. While foundation and private funding had provided for considerable growth over the years, the NWP had to articulate its work within the framework of its funders’ priorities; direct funding from the federal government coupled with legislative protection of the NWP model meant the project could set its own priorities—and disentangle itself from the strings attached to competitive funding.

It is significant, then, that the language of the bill Cochran introduced into Congress is noticeably different from the language that we saw earlier with Project English and the NEH. The Bill, S. 2039, was summarized as “a Bill to improve the quality of student writing and

learning, and the teaching of writing as a learning process in the Nation's classrooms" (np). While Congressional findings written into the legislation reiterate previous legislative rhetorics of crisis (e.g., students' declining literacy skills and teachers inadequately trained to teach writing), they go on to recognize the NWP as an exemplary project that values teachers' expertise, and the importance of teaching writing as a means of learning at all grade levels and across the curriculum. It also describes, fairly accurately, the writing project's model of professional development, recognizing teachers as capable of pursuing answers to the questions and concerns arising out of their own teaching practices. In short, the legislation marks a productive collaboration between the writing project and government stakeholders in literacy education, one that, unlike the Project English and NEH engagements, is substantially inflected—even created—by the writing project's philosophies.

The discursive shift evident in the NWP legislation is significant for two reasons. First, as Sterling points out, it protects the writing project model because whenever the NWP applied to supplemental grants, they could tell grantees, which might have their own priorities, "we can't violate our model" (Skype interview). Secondly, and, for reasons that I will discuss later in the chapter, perhaps more importantly, the legislative language disrupts the repeated narratives of crisis that cast teachers and students as the problem, rather than as part of the solution. The legislative interruption of mainstream discourse around literacy crises, teachers, and students demonstrates a milestone in disciplinary engagements with public stakeholders. Gray gestured toward this milestone in his 1998 reminiscence for the NWP journal, *The Voice*, and I think his summary is worth quoting at length:

The BAWP model, once considered offbeat and unconventional, has now substantially influenced the culture of literacy education. The ideas we tested in

that summer of 1974 are common currency at sites located at 157 colleges and universities. Over the past 25 years, the premises of the writing project have moved from the radical educational fringe to become principles accepted by enlightened educators worldwide. These concepts include the understandings that teachers are the best teachers of other teachers, that it is better to be collegial than hierarchical, that knowledge from practice is as important as knowledge from research, and that it is important that writing teachers write. For 25 years the National Writing Project has insisted that the continuing education of classroom teachers, focusing on the content of teaching, be a central tenet of any effort to improve our schools. Now more than ever we are being heard. (np)

Moving from the “radical educational fringe” to a prominent player in literacy education, the NWP’s continued commitment to its core philosophies is no small achievement. In the following section, then, I want to consider some of the ways that the NWP supports its teachers in making their philosophies and practices public to various audiences in order to advocate for the NWP and literacy education.

#### **IV. Teachers as Public Leaders**

As I have shown, the NWP puts teachers at the center of their professional development model, upending the usual academic hierarchy of research superseding practice in knowledge-making endeavors in the teaching of writing, and positioning teachers as leaders and agents of change in literacy education. This foundational philosophy derives from the first BAWP summer institute, but it has, of course, evolved over the duration of the NWP to inflect its current

strategies for positioning teachers as public leaders in changing dominant perceptions of writing, teaching, and learning.

Putting teachers at the center does not mean that they are simply expected to teach their colleagues something, but that they are guided through a deliberate inquiry learning process before being asked to bring that leadership to others (Eidman-Aadah telephone interview). The NWP recognizes teacher knowledge as a complex synthesis of their inquiry across five broad areas important to the teaching of writing: knowledge of the discipline (i.e., of writing); of practical techniques of teaching writing; of theories relevant to teaching and learning writing (i.e., theories of language, literacy, text, and learning); of research associated with the teaching and learning of writing; and of standards and other public policies associated with teaching and learning writing (Stokes 2). Involving teachers as knowledge makers rather than as recipients—across these domains—authorizes teachers as professionals with expertise to share with their colleagues, a dialogic process that usually begins with the summer institute. Initiating this kind of mutual inquiry in the seminar builds lines of communication between teachers, creating a professional ethos that is then carried back out into the world as teachers converse with multiple stakeholders in literacy education.

Within this site of collective inquiry, collegial critique, and peer support, teachers are explicitly supported in making their practice public through their teaching demonstration. Teacher-consultants (veterans of the summer institute who have demonstrated an aptitude for teaching teachers), work with teachers who are new to the summer institute to help them craft a dynamic presentation. As Lieberman characterizes it,

[teacher-consultants] coach teacher participants, demonstrating how to present to colleagues, how to engage an audience so that they are best positioned to learn

together, and how to blend practical discussion of the realities of teaching with theoretical perspectives on why certain teaching approaches are effective. As these demonstrations unfold, the fellows, recognizing collective professional expertise, often rethink and revise their own practices. (“Commitment and Competence” 191)

As we can see in this description of how teachers are supported through their teaching demonstrations, it is already a public venture. The collaborative process requires sharing one’s teaching practices with a selected public—a community of teachers who may have very different backgrounds, very different beliefs about education (Eidman-Aadahll telephone interview).

The dialogic work of interrogating one’s teaching practices and beliefs within the context of the summer institute is a fundamental first step in helping teachers learn the value of giving and receiving professional criticism, and develop a common interest in the quality of their public presentations (Lieberman and Wood 25). In refining their leadership skills, then, they also develop their teaching, because, as Lieberman and Wood find, when teachers make their teaching strategies public, “they become more aware of their intentions, their knowledge of their subject matter, and the influence of context on their students and themselves” (35). Thus, the idea of teachers teaching teachers—an idea held dearly within the NWP—is always already tied to engaging other perspectives on what’s happening in the classroom, on the role of the teacher, and on one’s teaching practices. Through this process of engagement, teachers gain authority within a broad set of discourses about the topic at hand. The flexible base of that authority provides a warrant, legitimizing what teachers have to say about writing, student writers, and the teaching of writing (Eidman-Aadahll telephone interview).

Beyond the work of the summer institute, I want to focus on one important way that NWP teachers make their practices visible and contribute to public discourse about literacy education in our current moment: Congressional advocacy.<sup>47</sup> Reminding Congress of the important work and many successes of the NWP is crucial not only to securing continuing appropriations, but to making the NWP a valued participant in policy discussions about literacy education. Teachers are a key part of Congressional advocacy, and they make their voices heard throughout the year by calling and writing their legislators, even inviting them to visit classrooms and summer institutes so they can see for themselves the impact NWP has on teachers and students (Washington telephone interview). The most concerted Congressional advocacy work is done each spring, when the NWP meets in Washington, D.C., to gather directors and teachers from across the country to meet with Congressional members.

Over the years, the NWP has strategically taught its members how to advocate for the project. Sterling says that when he first started as Executive Director of the NWP, he sought media and lobbying training, and then trained the NWP network about fruitful advocacy practices (Skype interview). Today, that advocacy training provides a robust framework for talking with Congressional members about the NWP, including publications such as the *Advocacy Toolkit for National Writing Project Sites* and a four-page memo on “How to Plan for Legislative Visits.” The *Toolkit* provides some basic information about Congress and about how a bill becomes a law; more importantly, it also offers comprehensive information covering topics ranging from how to establish relationships and communicate effectively with lawmakers, to developing talking points, to creating an outline for the meeting itself. Other “helpful hints” the NWP offers its teachers and site leaders to keep in mind when planning a congressional visit include advice such as preparing for the meeting by researching the legislator to find out about

their policy interests, voting records, and committee assignments; building a relationship with the legislator's staff, and encouraging them to use NWP teachers as resources; sticking to a few main points of support for your issue, and then making a specific request for continued support of the NWP (*Advocacy Toolkit* 3). These strategies may seem commonsensical, but they are also crucial reminders since making a Congressional visit is a new (and potentially scary) experience for many teachers.

The NWP has developed an inclusive and flexible program to support teachers and site directors in making their work public, equipping them with important strategies for ensuring productive and memorable meetings with their Congressional members. In conjunction with the orientation session that begins the NWP's spring meeting, the published materials on Congressional advocacy help teachers learn to persuasively frame their concerns about literacy education. The strategies used by the NWP for communicating with Congress are in some ways similar to those we have seen used by Project English and the NEH in that they revolve around framing a flexible and broad definition of literacy and literacy education—though the definition itself is different from those we saw earlier. The NWP does not base its conception of literacy around topoi of national defense or even educational excellence. Instead, while NWP recognizes the importance of writing in all stages of life (personal, academic, and professional), it consistently articulates writing (in various modes and media) as a complex activity and a means of inquiry and expression for learning in all grades and disciplines (NWP 3). In framing writing as a means of learning, the NWP also advocates for including writing in public conceptions of literacy, which mainstream discourse often takes to be limited to reading (Washington telephone interview).



There are probably a number of reasons why the definition of writing promoted by the NWP differs from those we saw circulating during Project English and the NEH seminars, but I think two possibilities warrant some specific attention. First, the social, political, material, and discursive contexts shaping our educational landscape since 1974 are significantly different from those of the earlier projects. Indeed, in the 38 years since Gray first began the Bay Area Writing Project, the discourse around education reform has shifted in some important ways. Second, as Eidman-Aadahl points out, there is no longer much cachet attached to the civic purposes of schools; the rhetorics linking our schools with “a great nation,” much less national defense, have dissipated over the years (telephone interview). Instead, the language of assessment and reform permeate educational discourse—languages that circulate freely in public spheres, but that most people do not really understand.

Promoting writing and literacy as interconnected ways of learning is a means of reminding people that everyone is a learner, and everyone can understand the relationship between teaching and learning if they remember back to their own educational experiences, whether inside or outside academia (Buchanan telephone interview). Helping people recognize the relationship between teaching and learning is an important strategy for the NWP because it disrupts the discourse of accountability and standardized testing that permeates the language of assessment that is now dominant in public discourse about education.

In keeping with its efforts to disrupt the dominant discourse of education, the NWP consistently positions writing instruction as a bipartisan issue. To that end, I find it crucial that the NWP’s definition of writing is flexible enough to allow for changing literacy practices. For example, the NWP has been at the forefront of thinking about what it means to teach writing in an age of digital communication, and what writing looks like when we include digital and

multimodal composition. We are living in moment of particular partisan entrenchment, and the NWP's capacious conception of writing enables it to insist on writing as a bipartisan issue. Regardless of political affiliation, we can all agree that writing—including writing with digital technologies—is essential for students learning at every grade level and in all subjects; in other words, the NWP's definition of writing makes it available as a key term for bipartisan collaboration.

Buchanan, Eidman-Aadahl, Sterling, and Washington offer some reflections about additional strategies—some equally commonsense and some more nuanced—that contribute to a successful Congressional meeting. First, as Eidman-Aadahl points out, it is important to remember there are built in authority relationships in any discursive exchange. In this case, legislators are *supposed* to listen to their constituents (e.g., the NWP teachers meeting with them). Teachers making their first visit may feel awkward and intimidated, but in many ways *they* occupy the position of authority. Once teachers can fully own that position, the next step is to discern the “grade of understanding” or the frame that the legislator is bringing to the conversation (of course, this is where the earlier advice about doing one's homework becomes critical). Understanding the frame within which the legislator understands education policy, teaching and learning, and writing is important in crafting a message that will be well received.

Secondly, Eidman-Aadahl says that the NWP directors and leaders who are most successful in Congressional advocacy are those who can shift between multiple subject positions within the conversation. One such position to occupy is that of the teacher who has expert knowledge and can explain that knowledge in a legible way. Another, perhaps less obvious position, is that of the “parent figure” who can appeal to the legislator about how we want and need strong literacy education for “all our children.” The key to moving between these positions

is to connect with the legislator as a *person* rather than as a government functionary; most people working in the government are there because they want to do good work and to make a difference. It is important to respect their intentions, even in the midst of policy disagreements.

All four NWP directors talk about how important it is to bring student work to the meeting, to be able to share a concrete story about teaching and learning. Sharing student work, according to Buchanan, helps make evident why writing—and writing instruction—matters in the classroom. It also helps legislators remember what they already know about being a learner (telephone interview). Sterling adds that bringing in student writing and narratives about the classroom is vital in connecting with legislators on an emotional level, but that for a truly successful meeting, you also need to connect on a logical level. To that end, he recommends also bringing in hard data (preferably in both textual and graphic form) to evidence the NWP's success in improving student writing and teacher longevity (Skype interview).

Finally, all four directors emphasized the importance of being collegial in building relationships with legislators, and in maintaining a positive ethos during the visits. Washington recounts that she once asked a legislative aide with whom she had worked quite a bit about why NWP teachers are so memorable. The aide replied that it was because NWP teachers come into meetings with enthusiasm, and speak about their successes rather than their problems—a refreshing change of pace from most meetings.

## **V. Changes within the NWP**

For twenty years, the NWP was authorized by the Department of Education through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; from its first federal funding of \$10 million in 1991, federal appropriations rose to \$25.65 million for the 2010 fiscal year. That all changed on March

2, 2011, when President Obama signed a bill eliminating direct federal funding for the NWP (Washington “Statement” 1; Washington “Testimony” 1). Falling victim to the national financial crisis, and Congressional threats to eliminate all “earmarks” in the federal budget, the NWP lost fifty percent of its operating budget (website).<sup>48</sup> The loss of federal monies has meant a “seismic shift” in the way things are funded within the NWP, especially at the national level, including a nearly 65% reduction in national staff (Sterling Skype interview).

However, despite the catastrophic loss—a loss that in many cases would signal the end of a nonprofit organization—the NWP is continuing to move forward with its work. Polling local sites, the NWP found that its members valued being part of a national network, and wanted to continue regardless of what happens with federal funding in the future; as of March, 2012, 187 sites have signed “Continuing Association Forms” signaling commitment from their local university to continue their work (Buchanan telephone interview). During the years that the NWP received directed funding, local sites were required to match federal dollars one-to-one, though in 2010 the NWP claimed it leveraged federal dollars three to one due to the number of sites whose host universities contributed more than the federal monies it received. It remains to be seen what the financial curtailment will mean to the NWP and to local sites, but based on the “Continuing Association Forms,” it seems that a large percentage of host universities are committed to continued site support. Certainly, the widespread dedication to persist as a national network of writing projects, regardless of federal funding, testifies to the significance of the NWP in countless teachers’ professional lives. To simply view it in those terms, however, is to overlook some important lessons in its strategies for forming public partnerships with multiple constituencies—lessons that may prove valuable for composition and rhetoric scholars as the field continues in its public turn.

Perhaps one of the most important lessons we can learn from the NWP comes from its infrastructure, from its inception as the BAWP to a national network of individual sites. Unlike Project English and the NEH seminars, the NWP began as a local project and, with a proven track record, grew into a national organization. However, even as the NWP consolidated at the national level, its base remained in the local sites. The flexibility and durability of the NWP thus comes in large part from the fact that it is collectively “owned” by the local sites. In many ways, one might argue that the NWP’s grassroots beginnings remain in effect today, as the national organization exists to support the work of the local sites rather than institutionalizing a more hierarchical framework. As a result, the budgetary slash at the national level, while disheartening (to say the least), did not destroy the infrastructure’s local base.

More importantly, however, may be the fact that because the NWP began on its own terms (with local funding), by the time it was authorized by the federal government, it was able to exert some control over the strings attached to the federal dollars. Unlike Project English and the NEH seminars, where literacy educators had to work within the constraints assigned by those outside the field, the authorizing legislation was written in language consistent with the mission and values of the NWP. Indeed, as Gray reported, the passage of Public Law 102-62 meant that Congress and Administration had given their support “to all that the National Writing Project represents and stands for” (*Quarterly* back cover). For the twenty years that the federal government funded the NWP project, then, it did so on the NWP’s own terms. In an era of competitive funding, when successful grant proposals are those that fit the applicants’ goals inside those of the granting organization, this is no insignificant victory.

The other major lesson I think we can learn from the NWP about engaging public constituencies in literacy education is their emphasis on writing as a bipartisan issue. It may be

ironic for some readers to remember that the NWP was authorized by a Republican president, and slashed by a Democratic one. The NWP does not target one political party in its advocacy efforts, nor, for that matter, does the NWP derive its membership from a single party. Rather, the NWP attempts to engage all interested stakeholders—a strategy that seems particularly resonant with their emphasis on interrogating one’s teaching practices through multiple perspectives. Partisan lines often circumscribe public discourse about literacy education; it seems to me that persisting in attempts to communicate across political entrenchment holds at least the potential to enrich those conversations.

One of the ways that the NWP positions writing as bipartisan is to try to avoid stepping into constructions of the crisis rhetorics that contradict the NWP’s core values about writing, teaching, and learning (Eidman-Aadahll telephone interview). Most rhetorics of literacy crises position teachers as the problem, as the cause of students’ declining literacy skills. According to Eidman-Aadahll, rather than wading into the fraught discourse circulating within this mainstream construction of crisis, and it’s proposed “solution” of “teacher-proofing” the classroom in order for students to learn more “content knowledge,” the NWP tries to show the incredible lost potential of the brilliance of students that we cannot access if we fail to invest in our teachers as knowledgeable experts. Washington adds that disrupting mainstream discourse about teachers-as-the-problem not only helps bipartisan publics to recognize teachers’ knowledge and expertise, but also helps change the way we construct students in that discourse. If we help teachers construct a professional ethos that recognizes their own knowledge and expertise, it follows that those teachers will begin to recognize their students’ knowledge, drawn from their lived experiences as well as from their time in school. Acknowledging students’ own knowledge and

expertise is then the first step in viewing them as creative, curious beings interested in co-creating knowledge with their teachers.

A grassroots project that started as a small, local effort to reform the teaching of writing—and the role of teachers in that reform—the NWP has grown to be a major advocate (and resource) for teachers, students, writing, and writing instruction in this country. Reviewing the history of the NWP makes clear that, as Richard Sterling aptly said, the project’s milestones are marked by wonderful pieces of luck all throughout its history (Skype interview). In many ways, one might argue that the NWP has evolved and sustained itself over the years because of a perfect confluence of people, funding, and social contexts. While I do not disagree with Sterling’s characterization of the NWP’s history, it is important to remember that the NWP has remained a vibrant program not just through happy accident, but in large part because of sustained, informed strategies for “going public” with its fundamental values and approaches to the teaching of writing.

*What could composition studies, if asked, say about the current state of reading and writing among America's students, both secondary and post? What do—and should—high school students write and how well? How does that relate to college writing and expectations there? How might we justify our teaching to audiences who don't know or believe what we do, people for whom something like a literacy cholesterol count is a commonsense goal?*

~Doug Hesse, "A Nation Dreams of Teacher-Proofing: Neglected Expertise and Needed Writing Research" (2009)

## **5. Reflections on Lessons (to be) Learned**

In the opening paragraphs of this study, I recounted an exchange with my professors in which I was advised to keep quiet about my professional life in order to avoid stale jokes about people having to watch their grammar around me. Over the ensuing seven years of my graduate study, I have had more colleagues than I can count share similar experiences of having friends, family, and random acquaintances jocularly suggest that they would have to mind the "grammar police" when in the presence of a writing teacher. It seems that sharing these stories becomes a kind of initiation ritual for composition and rhetoric teachers, a way to identify a common cause uniting the field by pitting those of us "inside" the field against "outsiders" who do not understand our work. While I recognize the professional bonding that such stories yield, I am discomfited by the divisiveness fostered by those same stories that inexorably mark those ignorant outsiders who fail to understand the importance of our research and teaching.

As I detailed in Chapter 1, our disciplinary histories tell us that we have consistently failed to redress public critiques of student writers and writing instruction, much less establish productive relationships with public constituencies. This history creates a problem for us in our present moment, as it suggests not only the importance of creating collaborative alliances with multiple publics, but also emphasizes our longstanding inability to do so. Given our tradition of



perceiving disciplinary engagements with the public as contentious, adversarial, and embattled, it is easy to fall into patterns of un-nuanced polemics about public encroachment on our work. It is also easy to believe attempting more productive relationships with the public is futile. One result of such pessimism, as Doug Hesse suggests in the epigraph to this chapter, is that the field does not have a clear or consistent strategy for dismantling the insider/outsider binary in order to communicate with public audiences about our professional expertise or about what a rich literacy education might look like.

In our current moment the language of assessment and accountability dominates public discourse about education. In response to these changing rhetorical contexts, composition and rhetoric scholars are beginning to recognize the urgency of communicating our disciplinary knowledge and teaching expertise to broader publics both inside and outside the academy.<sup>49</sup> These conversations generally suggest that if we cannot find ways to make persuasive arguments to public stakeholders about the nature of literacy, about our research and our teaching, we will have little authority to exert in setting the policies governing our classrooms. For example, Peter Mortensen argues that our ethical obligations to those whose literacies we study and the publics we serve demand that we learn how to communicate our knowledge in compelling terms for public dissemination: if we do not, “we consign ourselves to mere spectatorship in national, regional—and, most importantly, local—struggles over what counts as literacy and who should have opportunities to attain it” (183). The stakes of Mortensen’s argument are significant: do we, as a field, as individual teachers and scholars, want to be spectators or participants in public debates about literacy education? Assuming the answer is the latter, as Mortensen makes clear it must be, then we need to learn how to effectively communicate beyond the boundaries of academe.

Similarly, Linda Adler-Kassner contends that “if WPAs and writing instructors are not comfortable with the current direction that [public] discussions about education (and writers and writing) are taking, it is important for us to be able to think and act strategically to change the frames around those discussions and the stories emanating from them” (180). The implication of Adler-Kassner’s contention is that if we cannot find ways to alter the frames shaping public discussions about student writers and writing instruction, we will find it difficult—if not impossible—to build bridges between disciplinary “insiders” and “outside” constituencies, bridges that might make it possible for us to work collaboratively by identifying a common set of goals for literacy education.

More recently, Chris Gallagher argued that English studies is remarkably bad at intervening in public discussions about literacy and literacy education, with the result being that we have a poor track record of shaping the public policies that inflect our work. He goes on to claim that

Part of the problem, as I see it, is simply that we have done so little public policy work and therefore have little collective wisdom about undertaking it. Another part of the problem is that so many policymakers refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of our knowledge claims. The challenge we face, then, is twofold: we need to learn (and to teach one another) how to do this work and we need to confront the forces that limit our visibility to policymakers. However daunting, this is a challenge that we must undertake, lest we lose control of our profession.

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Gallagher’s delineation of the twofold challenge facing the field is compelling. Composition and rhetoric needs more robust strategies for productively responding to and reframing public

valuations of basic literacy skills; we also need to find ways to ensure that we are seen and heard as important participants in those discussions.

In response to this line of argument about the importance of engaging multiple constituencies in literacy education in our current moment, my dissertation complicates the insider/outsider binary by rewriting our disciplinary history of failure to explore moments of productive communication with public stakeholders. We continue to work in an educational system that is significantly influenced by public rhetorics of crisis ranging from official policies such as No Child Left Behind, to reports such as the Spellings Commission's *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, to articles such as Professor X's "In the Basement of the Ivory Tower" published in the national press.<sup>50</sup> In each of these discursive assaults on literacy education, charges abound about students' declining literacy skills and about teachers' failures to instill basic writing skills. My investment in this dissertation project is, in large part, an attempt to embolden myself to believe that composition and rhetoric scholars can, in fact, open lines of communication to reshape public discourse about writing, student writers, and writing instruction—to enable policymakers to accept our knowledge claims.

Project English, the NEH Seminars, and the NWP evidence moments of fruitful collaborations between the discipline (writ large) and the federal government (as a public stakeholder in literacy education). As such, they complicate easy narratives about the unchanging nature of public criticisms of our work. The function of this chapter, then, is to do two things: 1) to use the more nuanced history I have detailed throughout this dissertation to recognize how scholars today draw on successful strategies from the past, and 2) to understand how those strategies provide viable models for the field to continue the pressing work of developing productive relationships and open lines of communication with multiple publics within the

rhetorical contexts of our current moment. I argue that studying the strategies these initiatives used to represent their work to an outside audience affords a critical investigation of the ways we can leverage public investments in writing to create opportunities for advancing our profession. Identifying these strategies helps us recognize the ways teachers and scholars are using them even now to develop more positive relationships with multiple constituencies in our current moment. Finally, the strategies used by these three initiatives serve as models for our current moment, suggesting ways that we might intervene in rhetorics of literacy crises to open lines of communication between those “inside” and “outside” the field. Rewriting the history of disciplinary “failures” to communicate with public stakeholders in literacy education thus provides a positive rather than a negative reference point to help us think in more nuanced ways about how the field can and should engage multiple constituencies in the teaching and learning of writing.

We cannot, of course, apply these historical lessons wholesale, especially given that the rhetorical contexts shaping our work are very different from those framing the earlier initiatives; we can, however, use the strategies employed by these projects as a guide or heuristic in helping us recognize and analyze productive engagements with the public in our current moment. In this final chapter, then, I want to underscore some of the strategies shared, albeit with different inflections, by Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP. To be sure, our political, economic, and educational contexts are vastly different from those surrounding the three initiatives. In emphasizing these strategies, however, I want to consider their relevance and potential contributions to current conversations about literacy education. Rewriting our history to acknowledge the productive forays composition and rhetoric scholars have made in establishing collaborative relationships with the federal government prompts us to recognize some of the

positive interventions contemporary scholars have made in public discourse about writing, student writers, and writing instruction. Recognizing those fruitful engagements is a necessary disruption of the narratives of failure the field tends to tell itself, and holds potential for helping us learn how to make ourselves seen and heard in public discussions about literacy education.

## **I. Strategies to Learn From**

My analysis of Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP identifies the strategies each initiative used to develop productive collaborations with various constituencies, especially the federal government, as a public stakeholder in literacy education. Each project was, in its own way, a response to public perceptions of a literacy crisis. Constructive responses to literacy crisis are, of course, always rhetorical. To that end, I want to underscore some of the productive strategies we have seen throughout this dissertation, to consider how composition and rhetoric continues to draw on them as the field works to address the political, economic, and educational contingencies of our current moment to become a valued participant in public conversations about literacy education.

### *Responding to Instead of Resisting Public Concerns*

Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP each demonstrate possibilities for engaging public perceptions for student writers and writing instruction by leveraging popular rhetorics of literacy crises in order to secure outside support. In their own ways, Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP each responded to a particular iteration of literacy crisis and, as I have shown, each did so by *using and reframing* public rhetorics of crisis rather than resisting or ignoring them. Each initiative drew on mainstream concerns about educational crises, or

literacy crises more specifically, to communicate with the government and other publics in terms that would be legible to their interlocutors, thereby gaining federal funding for their project.

Public concerns about the educational crisis framing Project English were, as I discussed in Chapter 2, broader than the ways we normally understand literacy crisis. Sputnik incited national fears about the state of education in general, and more particularly about those subjects deemed crucial to national defense: science, mathematics, technology, and foreign languages. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) collaborated with the United States Office of Education (USOE) to use these concerns about the national educational crisis Sputnik made visible, working to draw public attention to the importance of English studies in cultivating national health. To advocate for Project English, the NCTE and the USOE drew on and made use of public concerns about crisis, excellence, and national defense to frame a crisis in the teaching and learning of English. Rather than resisting the idea of crisis, Project English advocates made use of the crisis and reworked it toward their own ends, strategically acknowledging and even compounding public concerns about the crisis in education to draw attention to their own goals for improving the teaching and learning of English at all grade levels. The literacy crisis that the NCTE and USOE “created” argued that strengthening the state of English education across the country would equip students to contribute to the country’s professional and civic needs. As a result, the NCTE effectively communicated its recommendations to the federal government, creating a productive relationship that lead to six years of funding for over twenty Curriculum Study Centers, a number of national conferences, and individual research projects.

The NEH seminars employed a similar strategy in responding to public concerns about an educational crisis, though there were some significant differences in the role composition and rhetoric played in those responses. Unlike Project English, English professionals did not lead the

Congressional advocacy efforts that resulted in the NEH legislation. The National Commission on the Humanities took on that responsibility, drawing on public concerns that the country invest in improving humanistic study in order to temper scientific advancements, lest we become slaves to rather than masters of technology. The Commission leveraged public concerns about the relationship between science and the humanities to argue that study in both was necessary to preparing students to be critical, creative thinkers and engaged citizens.

It was not until the NEH initiated its Summer Seminars for University and College Teachers that composition and rhetoric scholars had an opportunity to intervene in the NEH's arguments about humanistic study. Seminar leaders strategically drew on the Endowment's emphasis on making the humanities accessible to the general public outside the ivory tower to propose, facilitate, and assess seminars in composition and rhetoric in terms that would be legible to the NEH administration. Leading experts in the developing field of composition and rhetoric responded to the NEH's concern to articulate a use value for the humanities beyond academe to suggest the importance of the teaching and learning of writing as a vital intellectual and pedagogical component of humanistic study. Strategically accommodating the NEH in this way led to the Endowment funding dozens of seminars that reached hundreds of teachers and scholars. These seminars, then, were the result of productively engaging public perceptions of crisis—a disciplinary response that not only helped establish a professional identity for the field, but also worked to educate the NEH about the field's expanding research into conceptual and pedagogical knowledge about writing, student writers, and writing instruction.

The Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP), which grew into the NWP, began in response to public perceptions of a literacy crisis in California's schools: a shocking fifty percent of UC Berkeley's incoming students required remedial writing instruction in order to measure up to

college standards. As I discussed in Chapter 4, the rhetorics of crisis to which the BAWP responded explicitly blamed teachers for students' declining literacy skills. The BAWP made use of public concerns about teachers' limitations in order to secure institutional support from UC Berkeley for its summer seminar, agreeing that solving the literacy crisis necessitated strong professional development for teachers. Acknowledging public concerns about teachers' inadequacies, the BAWP proposed a professional development program that would get university faculty and K-12 teachers working together to resolve the problem. Over the years, the BAWP's strategic response to the literacy crisis of the early 1970s inspired a constructive relationship between universities and K-12 teachers, one that honored teachers' knowledge and created a supportive, collaborative environment for teachers to learn from (and with) each other.

Identifying Project English's, the NEH seminars', and the NWP's use and reframing of public critiques of student writers and writing instruction helps us recognize possibilities for extending those strategies into our current moment. The iterations of literacy crisis providing exigencies for all three of these initiatives bear strong similarities to discussions of the teaching and learning of writing going on now: students' declining literacy skills imperil the nation's health and well-being; strong literacy skills are necessary for individual and national economic prosperity; and, finally, teachers are largely to blame for students' poor literacy skills. Given the similarities in public critiques of student writers and writing instruction—even across vastly different political, cultural, and educational milieus—the strategies employed by Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP model viable options for developing productive relationships with interested stakeholders in literacy education by engaging and reframing current rhetorics of literacy crises.



## *Defining Literacy*

Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP compounded and reworked public rhetorics of crisis to secure federal support; this strategy does not mean, however, that they unquestioningly accepted all public critiques. Indeed, as we saw in my analyses of the initiatives, all three resisted mainstream understandings of literacy as “basic” reading and writing skills. Public conceptions of literacy during the respective time periods of these projects revolved around similar ideas about the importance of privileging instruction in grammar and usage. The belief that students needed to develop practical literacy skills for the workplace dominated mainstream ideas about the function of the writing classroom—a belief that all three initiatives resisted by promoting their own definitions of literacy.

In responding to public concerns about the post-Sputnik educational crisis, Project English advocates defined English as the interrelated study of language, literature, and composition. This tripartite definition insisted on English as a content subject integral to teaching students the critical, creative thinking and informed communication skills necessary for national health. Resisting Congressional desire to limit English to an instrumental conception of practical, basic skills in reading and writing, Project English worked to establish intellectual parameters for the field that would be respected by those outside.

A few years later, when public attention had shifted toward the humanities as a necessary counterbalance for science and technology, the NEH similarly defined humanistic study in terms of national well being, claiming that the humanities equipped one with the historical, cultural, and aesthetic knowledge necessary for the evaluative decisions and moral judgments of full civic engagement. While composition and rhetoric was not at first recognized as one of the areas of study falling under the umbrella of the humanities, seminar leaders and participants made a case

for the field as one that had much to contribute to literacy education, which, in turn, was vital to cultivating students' historical, cultural, and aesthetic knowledge. In making this argument, composition and rhetoric scholars offered new definitions of literacy that went far beyond mere grammar instruction. Rather, they promoted literacy as a complex and sophisticated activity, the processes of which necessitated disciplinary research in order to gain more knowledge about how writers learn to write and about how language works in the world.

The NWP has consistently promoted a broad, flexible definition of literacy as a means of learning and of self-expression—a strong counter to the “back to basics” imperatives that were part and parcel of the literacy crisis motivating the BAWP. Over the years, concern about students' inability to write clear, concise, and grammatically correct sentences has meant that public support for literacy education is generally interested in teaching practical literacy skills as the engine for individual and national economic prosperity. In the wake of these concerns, the NWP has maintained its definition of literacy, even insisting in recent years that a rich literacy education attends to students' reading and writing skills across multiple modes and media.

In our current moment, an era when assessment protocols and standardized testing dominate public discourse about literacy education, it is imperative that we find ways to reshape the instrumental definitions of literacy that still abound. The definitions of literacy promoted by Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP may not be the exact definitions we would want to propagate, but the strategy is nonetheless worthy of emulation. If we wish to reframe public critiques of student writers and writing instruction, the first step is to counter narrow definitions of literacy that could (and, arguably, do) constrain our teaching and research.

### *Framing Writing as a Bipartisan Issue*

Key to the broad definitions of literacy forwarded by Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP are their efforts to frame writing as a bipartisan issue in public discourse about literacy education. As composition and rhetoric has developed as a leftward-leaning field—and as the country has entered an era of acute partisan entrenchment—drawing on the initiatives’ strategies for securing bipartisan support could be crucial in revitalizing disciplinary responses to public critiques of student writers and writing instruction. Of the three initiatives in my study, the NWP is perhaps the most explicit in its commitment to generating bipartisan support, yet Project English and the NEH were also interested in disengaging from partisanship, albeit of a different kind. Where the NWP’s Congressional advocacy work mandates a political engagement, Project English and the NEH worked to build “bipartisan” bridges between science and the humanities. Project English reframed public interest in crisis, national defense, and educational excellence to argue English’s vital role in all three. Similarly, the NEH worked to position the humanities as a vital complement to the sciences, even getting scientists to speak about the importance of the humanities to enhance scientific advancement. To my mind, cross-disciplinary alliances of this kind are another kind of bipartisan support worth developing in our current moment when it is sometimes difficult to contextualize public attacks on literacy education—and on literacy educators—within efforts toward education reform across the curriculum.

As I discussed in my analysis of the NWP, it has consistently framed writing as a bipartisan issue in its Congressional advocacy work, appealing for support to legislators regardless of party affiliation—and it is not insignificant that a Republican Senator from Mississippi introduced the NWP legislation. Reminding legislators of what they already know about teaching and learning based on their own experiences as students helps the NWP position

writing as a critical component of learning and self-expression (Buchanan telephone interview). Drawing on common experiences of learning to remind legislators of what they already know about the relationship between writing and learning is thus essential to the NWP's efforts to justify bipartisan support for writing instruction because it builds a common cause. Public stakeholders in literacy education cross political party lines and, as such, may not agree on the best way to support writing instruction in the schools (any more than composition and rhetoric scholars agree on the best pedagogical practices for the teaching of writing). A first step, then, in forging bipartisan alliances is to help stakeholders agree on the importance of improving writing instruction at all grade levels and across the curriculum so that students are given opportunities to develop rich literacy practices.

#### *Collaborating Across the Curriculum and at all Grade Levels*

Finally, I want to underscore a strategy crucial to the success of Project English and the NWP, and, to a lesser extent, to the NEH seminars. Collaborating with teachers at all grade levels and across the curriculum was integral to the projects' bridge-building work. Given that Project English was responding to national alarm about a general education crisis, the NCTE would likely not have gained much traction with Congress had they focused their efforts on reforming writing instruction solely at the college level. Focusing on curricular research for literacy education at all grade levels, and modeling itself after the NDEA reforms in science education, Project English used the federal mandate to collaborate with K-12 teachers in order to pursue its own interests in developing an articulated curricula. While the collaboration between university faculty and K-12 teachers may have existed more in name than in practice, Project

English's work across all grade levels nonetheless helped support its work to define English and to leverage public rhetorics of crisis in order to secure support.<sup>51</sup>

The NEH seminars did not employ the same kind of collaborative strategy the other programs used, which is significant, I think, given that the seminars were deeply vested in professionalizing composition and rhetoric by exposing university faculty to new disciplinary research. In other words, the seminars were not interested in K-12 reform in the same ways that Project English and the NWP were. However, while the NEH seminars focused on helping university and college faculty retool themselves as composition and rhetoric scholars and teachers, they still pushed to increase access by limiting some seminars to community college teachers. It is also worth noting that my dissertation focuses exclusively on the NEH Summer Seminars for University and College Teachers; however, through other program lines, the NEH also sponsored seminars such as Carl Klaus' for administrators of first-year writing programs, and Elaine Maimon's on writing across the curriculum, as well, of course, as funding the Bay Area Writing Project for a number of years. My point here is that while the NEH did not initially work to support alliances between university faculty and K-12 teachers, or between different disciplines, as the seminars evolved the NEH did expand its focus to reach teachers who were disenfranchised by their intellectual, pedagogical, and material distance from the university, thereby forging some different kinds of cross-institutional alliances.

The NWP by definition, of course, put university faculty and K-12 teachers in conversation. However, it also extended its collaboration with K-12 teachers to include teachers across the curriculum, thereby cultivating the idea that writing to learn is beneficial in the teaching and learning of all subjects, not just English. A less hierarchical collaboration than Project English's, the NWP promoted itself as a professional development program focused on

improving the teaching of writing as it is taught *across the curriculum*—a strategy which, of course, was closely related to its strategies for defining literacy and responding to public concerns about students’ declining skills. The result of the collaborations instantiated in the NWP’s mission and practices is a national network literacy educators of all grade levels and all subjects, working together to not only improve their own teaching, but also to articulate their practices to various publics.

I emphasize the alliances between literacy educators of all levels forged by Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP because they highlight the importance of establishing and recognizing the same kinds of cross-institutional bridges today. It is all too easy to carve out segments of student populations in order to theorize about how to improve the teaching and learning of writing at specific grade levels: first-year college students, high school students, elementary and middle-school students. However, delimiting discussions about how to improve literacy education by grade level is counterproductive to the disciplinary argument that writing needs to be taught at all grade levels and in all subjects. If we wish to take our own argument seriously, then we need to find ways to establish collaborative relationships with our colleagues across grade levels (and across the curriculum).

## **II. Changing Rhetorical Contexts**

As we have seen throughout this dissertation, despite the recurrent themes running through the discourse of education reform and literacy crises, the social, political, and economic contingencies surrounding these debates are not static. The socio-political changes from the 1950s to our current moment are significant; so, too, are the differences in public discourse about education, student writers, and writing instruction. Even so, this more textured history of the

field's engagement with public stakeholders in literacy education allows us to recognize some of the ways that composition and rhetoric scholars are extending these strategies into current debates about writing instruction—something that our previous histories may have blinded us to. Moreover, recognizing the strategies that have been used productively in the past provides a heuristic for breaking down the insider/outsider binary in order to build collaborative relationships with multiple constituencies in the present.

I want to conclude by briefly considering the discourse around education reform and literacy crises in our current moment. Given this discourse, how might we repurpose the initiatives' strategies to forge alliances with outside stakeholders on a more local level? How does studying Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP help us recognize the positive ways that teachers and scholars are establishing fruitful relationships with multiple publics? How might we use our history of productive engagements with the federal government as a heuristic to imagine possibilities for going public with our work?

### *The Discourse of Education (Reform) and Literacy (Crisis)*

Over the last twenty years, the discourse of education (reform) has been dominated by standardized testing requirements stemming from the 1991 No Child Left Behind Legislation (NCLB). Linda Adler-Kassner describes the fundamental problem of NCLB as one tying curriculum and testing score to funding: “[s]tates are refused federal dollars when they stray from official prescribed components [of instruction and assessment]” (19). The result is the popular mantra that teachers are forced to “teach to the test” in order to ensure acceptable assessment outcomes so their schools will continue to receive federal funding. Passed early in George W. Bush's presidency, it is easy to frame NCLB in partisan terms, yet the legislation

passed with bipartisan support—perhaps because, as Angela Green explains, “[e]ducation, especially literacy, is now tied almost exclusively and quite openly to individual and national economic viability” (W371). Composition scholars interested in assessment often point out that the rhetoric of accountability stemming from NCLB and permeating public discourse about education translates to a rhetoric of blame: teachers are at fault for failing to teach the nation’s students to write at satisfactory levels, and should be held accountable for their failures (Adler-Kassner, Gallagher, Green). The so-called educational “failures” that the rhetoric of accountability makes visible has resulted in an increased push for standardized testing.

The discourse of education reform in our current moment also reveals a lack of cachet to the notion of education as a public good, or even to the idea that our schools are necessary for the social and cultural health of the country (Eidman-Aadah). Devaluing the idea of education as a public good is a marked change from the debates about education reform that we saw surrounding Project English and the NEH, a change that has led to significantly different discursive frames around education reform in our current moment. Guided by agencies such as the Department of Education and the College Board, public discourse about literacy education revolves around the economic implications of instrumental conceptions of literacy: students need to develop basic literacy skills as an engine for economic growth, and teachers need to be held accountable for ensuring that students demonstrate appropriate skill levels. The rhetorics of crisis and accountability derived from NCLB legislation and permeating public discourse about writing and writing instruction are indeed difficult to combat.

The discourse around literacy education has changed very little with the Obama administration. The Democratic reform of NCLB is much less revolutionary than many literacy educators had hoped, as its Race to the Top Program simply allows states flexibility in setting



their own assessment measures rather than being tied to national standards. Perhaps the all-but-in-name carry over from NCLB stems from bipartisan agreement that education reform is needed to adopt “standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy” (Race to the Top Executive Summary 2). Given that the discourse of assessment and standards has gained traction across multiple political administrations, it seems difficult if not impossible for composition and rhetoric scholars to successfully intervene in reshaping public discourse and building more productive relationships with the federal government. It is this sense of futility, then, that my dissertation combats through its more nuanced history of composition and rhetoric’s productive engagements with public stakeholders. Rather than focusing on disciplinary failures to redress public critiques of student writers and writing instruction, we can use our history of successful moments to recognize the productive work that scholars are doing even now to open lines of communication and forge alliances with multiple constituencies, and to embolden us to attempt such work ourselves.

### *History as Heuristic*

As we have seen throughout this dissertation, composition and rhetoric’s history of public engagements is more complicated than is usually understood. Far from being a history marked only by failure, the field has facilitated positive relationships with public stakeholders in literacy education, relationships that not only inflected mainstream understandings of literacy and literacy education, but also allowed the field to further its own intellectual and pedagogical commitments. The current dominant discourse surrounding literacy education that I detailed above makes it imperative that we continue to find ways to build bridges between the discipline

and multiple publics in order to ensure that composition and rhetoric scholars and teachers are acknowledged as necessary participants in education reform. The more nuanced history this dissertation uncovers enables us to see positive moments in our current moment; that is, it allows us to identify possibilities for deconstructing the insider/outsider sensibilities that all too often govern disciplinary responses to public concerns. To that end, I want to turn now to one example of how composition and rhetoric scholars are continuing to intervene productively in public policy—an example that might go unnoticed without the historical framework of Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP to help us recognize it as a positive intervention.

As I outlined above, NCLB values education, especially literacy education, as the engine of individual and national prosperity in the publication of several national reports on the state of higher education and college writing instruction. We can see those same valuations in a variety of publications growing out of NCLB. For example, the Spellings Commission's *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education* warns that the United States has become complacent about education, and that students' literacy skills are again on the decline. While the country has much to be proud of in terms of its historical commitment to higher education and resulting global dominance, other countries have followed the United States' lead and are now surpassing it in terms of creating an educated citizenry.

The Spellings Commission thus argues the time is ripe for revamping higher education in order to compete successfully in the global marketplace. In terms of literacy education, this means ensuring that students' prose literacy (defined as the ability to understand narrative texts such as newspaper articles) and document literacy (defined as the ability to understand practical information such as instructions for taking medicine) is raised to acceptable standards (the report claims that the most recent National Assessment of Adult Literacy indicated college graduates'

prose and document literacies have fallen to 31% and 25% respectively). In this definition, then, literacy is defined in terms of consumption rather than production, and through a fairly narrow instrumentalism—which has obvious resonances with the conservative conceptions forwarded by post-Sputnik discourse about the country’s educational crisis.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the seemingly intractable definitions of literacy as the key to individual and national prosperity, composition and rhetoric scholars have successfully intervened in the instrumental conceptions of writing and literacy forwarded by other national policy documents. It is not always easy to recognize these interventions, but the history I have detailed in this dissertation provides a useful heuristic for reading these documents as it enables us to see how composition and rhetoric scholars are continuing to use some of the same strategies that proved successful in the past. The College Board, for example, has issued a series of national reports on writing and writing instruction, including *The Neglected ‘R’: The Need for a Writing Revolution* (2003), and *Writing: A Ticket to Work...Or a Ticket Out* (2004). The former came out of an effort “to focus national attention on the teaching and learning of writing” given the “growing concern within the education, business, and policy-making communities that the level of writing in the United States is not what it should be” (7). The latter, a follow-up effort to help launch a “writing agenda for the nation” (5), surveyed 120 major American corporations, determining that writing is a “threshold skill” for hiring and promotion decisions, and that college graduates’ writing skills are often not sufficient for the workplace.

While at first glance *The Neglected ‘R’* might seem to rehearse the instrumental conceptions of literacy we saw in the Spellings’ report, a closer reading reveals that it significantly differs both in the definitions of literacy it forwards and in the policy recommendations it makes. These differences are no doubt attributable to the College Board’s

National Advisory Panel, which was comprised of writing experts: Richard Sterling, then Executive Director of the NWP; David M. Bloome, then President of the NCTE; and Jacqueline Jones Royster, a major figure in composition and rhetoric (the Spellings Commission had no such panel). While *The Neglected “R”* acknowledges popular concerns about education (e.g., assessment, technology, and teacher training), it also resists those concerns by offering a more capacious understanding of the importance of literacy education, and what kind of classroom support is necessary to improve the teaching and learning of writing. In short, the report responds to mainstream concerns about crisis by promoting its own definition of literacy, much as we saw in Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP. Disciplinary interventions in policy documents such as this one indicates some measure of hope that we may achieve some of the success Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP enjoyed in opening lines of communication and forging productive collaborations beyond disciplinary boundaries.

Indeed, we can see in *The Neglected “R”* evidence of how the composition and rhetoric scholars involved in composing the report worked with the College Board to both acknowledge public concerns and resist them by redefining literacy. For example, the report does suggest writing is an agent for economic success and upward mobility. “The reward for disciplined writing,” the report claims, “is the most valuable job attribute of all: a mind equipped to think.” However, it resists the economic theory of literacy by arguing that writing is also an agent of learning, of social and cultural transformation, and of political enrichment:

If students are to make knowledge their own, they must struggle with the details, wrestle with the facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else. In short, if students are to learn, they must write. (9)

In making this argument about the uses of literacy, *The Neglected “R”* moves beyond the rhetorics of accountability forwarded in *A Test of Leadership* to call for a “revolution of sorts, a cultural sea change that would provide writing with sufficient time and resources in the classroom” (17).<sup>53</sup> In advocating a writing revolution, the report argues we need to: increase the amount of time (across the curriculum) that students spend writing; develop clear and appropriate methods of assessment; integrate technology into the classroom for pedagogical and assessment purposes; and revamp teacher training so that *all* teachers are required to take coursework in teaching writing.

Despite the dismal situations in which literacy educators currently labor, identifying the productive strategies used by Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP help us recognize that it is possible to intervene in public discourse about literacy education—and, in fact, that composition and rhetoric scholars are continuing to use those strategies with some success. The involvement of composition and rhetoric scholars in composing *The Neglected “R”* cannot be insignificant in its call for a writing revolution, a call to action that is surely a productive response to public critiques of student writers and writing instruction. Moreover, were the writing revolution enacted, we would no doubt recognize the strong similarities between the strategies used by Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP, and the recommendations *The Neglected “R”* makes for revitalizing writing instruction at all grade levels and across the curriculum, to find viable methods of assessing both the curriculum and students’ learning, and to better prepare teachers of writing. In short, composition and rhetoric scholars’ participation in composing *The Neglected “R”* marks a positive moment of disciplinary engagements with multiple publics that might be more fully recognized through the heuristic resources of the disciplinary history I detail in this dissertation.

### III. Identifying Public Allies and Measuring Success

At the same time that our political climate is marked by extreme partisan entrenchment, the discourse around education reform is remarkably uniform across party lines—making it difficult to imagine achieving anything like the same success of Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP in securing federal support. What this difficulty brings into sharp relief, to my mind, is not the likelihood of failure, but the need to (re)evaluate the publics we choose to engage and the standards by which we measure the success of those engagements. As I think about how composition and rhetoric might draw on the strategies Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP deployed in order to build alliances with the federal government, it seems to me that we would be wise to follow certain clichés about activism: start small, start local, start where we can make a difference.

As I discussed in Chapter Four, the NWP provides a strong model of how literacy educators might start small, to build a successful project on the local level before going national. The NWP's continued emphasis on the work of local sites also demonstrates the importance of locating the parameters of local literacy issues in which composition and rhetoric might successfully intervene. Indeed, as I noted previously, it was through the work of local sites in Mississippi that the writing project first secured federal funding to become a national network. Following that kind of grassroots example may, in fact, be one of the best ways for the field to repurpose the strategies Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP used to effectively communicate with public stakeholders. Certainly, of the three projects, the NWP was able to sustain federal support for the longest period of time—and to do so more or less on its own terms. One reason the field has had difficulty in reframing public rhetorics of literacy crises is because such rhetorics rely on proclaiming *problems*, not *issues*. Distinguishing between

problems and issues is crucial, according to Adler-Kassner, because problems are large and amorphous, overwhelming any attempt at mitigating action (100). Issues, on the other hand, “are definable, specific things that can be changed” (101). The stories of student writers and writing instruction circulating in public media are generally about how “kids today” cannot write, or about how our country is at risk because of a national literacy crisis. Granted, there is a fair amount of political hyperbole embedded in these narratives, but it works in large part because these are big, meaty “problems.”

Instead of trying to solve—or deny—problems of literacy crises, we can emulate the strategies Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP used to acknowledge and reframe public concerns about literacy education. In doing so, however, I would follow in the footsteps of the NWP to propose that we work to engage public stakeholders at the local level, on local issues, rather than beginning by attempting to assert ourselves in national conversations. The benefits of focusing on local issues instead of problems are twofold: 1) drawing more defined boundaries around an issue makes it possible to talk about it in concrete ways; and 2) delimiting issues allows us to draw on the strategy of acknowledging rather than resisting public concerns about student writers and writing instruction. For example, as individual teachers and administrators, there is not much we can do or say about solving a national literacy crisis—but there is probably a lot we could say in response to public concerns about the student writers and writing instruction in our home institutions.

Advocating that we focus on local issues in engaging public concerns about literacy education necessitates, of course, rethinking the publics that we seek out as allies. My analysis of Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP has focused largely on the relationships they each forged with the federal government in order to secure financial support. However, it is

unlikely that the same kind of financial support from the federal government enjoyed by the three initiatives is feasible in our current moment. Even so, the strategies used by the three initiatives in my study are flexible in scale, and could perhaps be put to more effective use with local or institutional publics, much as the NWP has done. Imagine, for example, what kinds of productive relationships and collaborations might be possible if composition and rhetoric scholars could draw on disciplinary knowledge about writing and the teaching of writing to define literacy in terms that a university community—faculty and administrators alike—could agree on?

Finally, even as I acknowledge the likely limitations of communicating with the federal government by emulating the strategies used by Project English, the NEH seminars, and the NWP, I find myself questioning how we measure success in terms of productive engagements with public constituencies. As I have shown through this dissertation, public discourse about literacy education invariably focuses on students' declining literacy skills and the need for educational reform, reinforcing a disciplinary commonplace: throughout its history, composition and rhetoric scholars have failed to substantively address or reframe public critiques of student writers and writing instruction. As I read this commonplace, it relies on two fallacies—that throughout its history, composition and rhetoric has failed to productively respond to public concerns about literacy education, and that if the field had managed to substantively reframe public critiques, we would have laid them to rest long ago and would no longer be facing charges of literacy crises.

The idea of being freed from accusations of literacy crises is certainly appealing, but I think it is a mistake to believe that the goal is to eliminate public concerns about literacy education. We must recognize that education—and literacy education in particular—is



inescapably public, and inextricably political, and that this is a good thing. As such, it is important that we continue to break down the insider/outsider binary in order to open up communicative possibilities. Peter Dow reminds us in *Schoolhouse Politics*, his history of post-Sputnik reforms to science education, of the importance of this point:

Our discussions of what we want to teach our children are seldom separated from our image of who we are as a people and what we want to become as a nation. This was true of the Sputnik reforms, and the success of the current effort to change the schools will also be measured against this vision. Does it further our goals as a nation and contribute to our sense of national identity? Does it strengthen our position with respect to those who are perceived to be our competitors or our adversaries? Is it liberating for all people, not just a privileged elite? Is it morally defensible? These questions are too important to be left to the professional educators alone. The discussion of our national educational goals requires the participation of our political leaders, who reflect the will of the people and thus can chart the course of educational reform in directions that are politically acceptable. They must articulate the nature of our current educational crisis and craft solutions that will attract long-term public support. (267)

We need to communicate with our political leaders, with our institutional leaders, with our students, their parents, and our communities, about the goals and function of literacy education. Building relationships with all of these constituencies affords opportunities for the field to learn how to educate “outsiders” to speak on our behalf, to gain support for our work. In short, we need to measure success in this arena not in terms of what conversations we are able to put to rest, but in terms of those we are able to open and sustain.

Obviously, the question of how to secure public support (financial and otherwise) for our work is not an easy one to answer—and I suspect that all of the methods I’ve discussed here (as well as ones I haven’t yet imagined) would need to be employed if we are to achieve any measure of success in our polarized political climate. My dissertation demonstrates that literacy education is always both public and political, shaping our curricular choices about what to teach and our pedagogical choices about how. To that end, rewriting the traditional disciplinary history of failure enables us to invigorate disciplinary responses to public criticisms of our work by studying—and repurposing—the successful strategies used by the three initiatives in my study to build connections with multiple stakeholders across disciplinary and institutional boundaries.

In an era of fractious political division and increasing budgetary restrictions, it is crucial that we not look to moments of defeat, that we not retreat behind the walls of our profession—but that we work to forge alliances with our public stakeholders. Yet, the possibilities for bridge building are narrowed when the only story we hear is one of tension, frustration, and disappointment. It is essential that we listen to other stories: now, more than ever, the field needs to sustain productive responses to public conversations about literacy education because, as this dissertation shows, such conversations not only shape public policy, but also play a role in shaping composition’s research agenda(s) and pedagogical commitments.

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## Notes to Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> See Faigley, Ohmann, Shaughnessy, Soliday, Stanley, and Trimbur.

<sup>2</sup> I am mindful that, in recent years, many historiographers have demonstrated that Harvard is not, in fact, our only antecedent (Donahue and Moon; Gold).

<sup>3</sup> Sheils does not use disciplinary labels, but it seems clear that at least some of the theoretical investments of the process and expressivist movements fall under her rubric of “the creative school.”

<sup>4</sup> See Mary Boland’s unpublished dissertation, “Academic Freedom and the Struggle for the Subject of Composition,” for a close study of how writing programs at UT Austin, Minnesota, and Stony Brook were decimated by these sorts of fraught exchanges with outside stakeholders.

<sup>5</sup> Fish, of course, is not just a public intellectual, he is also a professor of English—yet another example of the permeable boundaries between *the* discipline and *the* public.

<sup>6</sup> Fish makes similar pronouncements about composition’s misguided notions of privileging content over form in a number of venues, including a 2002 article, “Say It Ain’t So” in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and a 2009 series in *The New York Times* on “What Should Colleges Teach?”

<sup>7</sup> See also, for example, Richard Bernstein’s “The Rising Hegemony of the Politically Correct”; Heather Mac Donald’s “Why Johnny Can’t Write”; or Nan Miller’s “English 101: Prologue to Literacy or Postmodern Moonshine?”

<sup>8</sup> See Almagno, Hawk, and Klaus for some of the few in-depth studies of the seminars.

## Notes to Chapter 2

<sup>9</sup> The “problems” central to the life-adjustment model of education encompassed a wide range of concerns—from picayune to profound. For example, in 1950 the Illinois Life-Adjustment Curriculum Program published a list of basic problems central to the educational enterprise. The compiled list included such concerns as: the problem of acquiring the social skills of dancing, playing party games, doing parlor stunts, etc.; the problem of improving one’s personal appearance; the problem of selecting a ‘family dentist’ and acquiring the habit of visiting him systematically; the problem of developing and maintaining wholesome boy-girl relationships; the problem of acquiring the ability to study and help solve economic, social, and political problems; the problem of making one’s self a well-informed and sensitive ‘citizen of the world’; and the problem of acquiring the ability to distinguish right from wrong and to guide one’s actions accordingly” (Bestor 425).

<sup>10</sup> The Basic Issues Conference was jointly sponsored by the Modern Language Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, the College English Association, and the American Studies Association, and conference reports were published simultaneously in the journals of all four organizations.

<sup>11</sup> In addition to the general provisions accorded in Title I, the NDEA provided funding for student loans (Title II); strengthening mathematics, science, and modern foreign language instruction (Title III); national defense fellowships (Title IV); guidance counseling and testing (Title V); language development (Title VI); research in the pedagogical uses of media (Title VII); vocational education (Title VIII); science information (Title IX); and improvement of statistical services for state education agencies (Title X) (*The National Defense Education Act of 1958: A Summary and Analysis*).

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<sup>12</sup> A “Report on the National Interest Project” in the NCTE archives explains that the “National Interest” is the term used to refer to NCTE’s effort to obtain greater support from foundations and the federal government for the teaching of English and the humanities. It is loosely related not only to NCTE’s efforts with HEW [United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] but with the MLA, Commission on English [College Entrance Examination Board], and other important national groups which share our common interest.

<sup>13</sup> For example, *The National Interest* draws on Joseph Mersand’s 1961 survey of *Attitudes Toward English Teaching*, which collected 1250 responses from national business, government, and educational leaders on the perceived writing abilities of recent college graduates.

<sup>14</sup> Dozens of individuals and organizations testified at the hearings, and/or provided written statements of support, as they advocated for funding to support a range of educational advances in all disciplines. For my purposes, I will focus on the statements made by those lobbying for funding English.

<sup>15</sup> Before becoming the HEW Commissioner of Education, McMurrin was a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Utah where he also served as Academic Vice-President, Dean of the College of Letters and Sciences, and Vice-President of the University of Utah. In addition to serving as the head of NCTE, Allen was a Professor of English, specializing in linguistics, at the University of Minnesota, and had previously served as the 1952 Chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication.

<sup>16</sup> McMurrin repeated his testimony at the House of Representatives Hearings before the Joint Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Education and Labor held in June of 1961.

<sup>17</sup> Critique of the connection drawn in the original legislation between education and national defense is perhaps best articulated in the Recommendations for Revisions and Extensions of the National Defense Education Act adopted by the Board of Directors of American Council of Learned Societies: “Title I links the act’s educational measures with national defense and security, and finds warrant for them in ‘the present emergency’ or the ‘present educational emergency’ .... The word ‘emergency’ connotes a sudden challenge of limited duration which can be met by temporary or even hasty measures. It may now be time to look at our educational situation not from the point of view of emergency needs and specific defense shortages, but rather in the light of our national health and productivity as a democratic state with a strong sense of permanence, intelligently prepared to meet the future with resilience and fully developed resources.” (*Hearings Before the Subcommittee of Education of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare* 239).

<sup>18</sup> The entire text of *The National Interest* was additionally appended to the record.

<sup>19</sup> In their recommendations for Title VI amendments, both McMurrin and Allen call for funding research and training in English as a Second Language (ESL), referencing a supplementary publication entitled *The National Interest and the Teaching of English as a Second Language*.

<sup>20</sup> In recognition of NCTE’s work in passing the 1964 NDEA amendment to authorize funding for English, Albert Kitzhaber, then NCTE president, and James Squire, NCTE Executive Secretary, were invited to Washington to witness President Kennedy sign the bill (Jewett).

<sup>21</sup> Another useful source, *A Guide to Available Project English Materials*, compiled in 1969 by Donna Butler and Bernard O’Donnell, provides abstracts for over 260 curriculum guides, research reports, textbooks and other materials produced by the Curriculum Study Centers.

<sup>22</sup> Project English was initially coordinated through the USOE’s Cooperative Research Branch. Following a reorganization a year or two later, administration was handled by a newly formed

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USOE Bureau of Research and Development, and coordinated first by J.N. Hook, followed by Erwin R. Steinberg, and then Lewis Leary. When Project English was reorganized under the Bureau of Research and Development, the application process was streamlined in a variety of ways, and most applications were assigned to a new panel of English experts. Note: the Final Report of the Nebraska Curriculum Development Center indicates that John Gerber served as the third Project English coordinator, not Leary.

<sup>23</sup> See Strain for a discussion of CCCC panels during the 1960s that focused on writing to—and for—the federal government. See, also, Richard Larson’s 1967 *College English* essay “NDEA Institutes in English: Proposals and Their Problems,” in which he advises readers on how to successfully persuade the national government to pay for a summer institute.

<sup>24</sup> All study centers were funded for a maximum of five years, with a total grant of \$250,000 (plus additional local funds).

<sup>25</sup> National interest in the “able” student is also evidenced by the fact that when McMurrin requested funding for Project English at the HEW appropriations hearings, he also requested authorization for Project Talent. Like Project English, the latter was modeled after the NSF curriculum studies, but focused on research to help teachers uncover students’ latent talent (*Hearings Before the Subcommittee* 336).

<sup>26</sup> That the unmarked student target implies the “able” student is also evidenced by the fact that the Northwestern and Nebraska Centers are categorized, like the Carnegie Tech center, as a “General English Curriculum Development Program,” in contrast to the “Special Interest Programs” which includes Curriculum Study Centers such as Hunter College’s “English as a Second Language and Bilingual Readers” and Gallaudet College’s in “English for Deaf Students” (*Summary Progress Report*).

<sup>27</sup> Neal Lerner argues that Project English was cross-institutional in name only, claiming that the development and dissemination plan for new curricula proceeded in a traditional manner: developed by university faculty and handed down to K-12 teachers for implementation (116). While it is impossible to ascertain how each Curriculum Study Center conducted its work, my reading of the archives indicate that Lerner’s critique is unsubstantiated.

<sup>28</sup> It may also have helped that the American literature portion of the literature programs could be viewed as serving nationalistic ends. For example, it could be argued that the Carnegie Tech program fostered a sense of nationalism by looking at “important aspects of the American character as they are revealed in our literature—such as aspects of American Puritanism, the American desire to get ahead in the world. American optimism, and the American social conscience” [*sic*] (Senior High School Curriculum 3).

### Notes to Chapter 3

<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting that the twenty-member commission was comprised not only of humanist scholars, but of college administrators such as Clark Kerr, President of the University of California; industry leaders such as Devereux C. Josephs, former Chair of New York Life Insurance Company; and scientists such as Mina Reese, Dean of Graduate Studies at City University of New York, and Pendleton Herring, President of the Social Science Research Council.

<sup>30</sup> It is interesting to note that while not a member of the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities, Lister Hill chaired the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare. Hill was one

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of the original authors of the NDEA. Also of interest is the fact that Joseph Clark, who railed against supporting literary study during the NDEA hearings, was a member of both the Senate Committee and the Special Subcommittee.

<sup>31</sup> Determining the hundreds of teachers who participated in these seminars over the years is even more difficult as the *NEH Annual Reports* only lists the names of fellowship recipients, not the seminars to which they were accepted. Nonetheless, it is easy to see from even this incomplete list that the range of teachers and scholarly endeavors addressed through these seminars helped to professionalize the field's intellectual engagements beyond longstanding perceptions of the service components of teaching of first-year writing.

<sup>32</sup> \$819,989 was allowed for the 21 seminars, plus an additional \$424,000 to the 212 seminarians (*NEH 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Report* 66).

<sup>33</sup> Due to Freedom of Information Act exclusions, the NEH redacts all personal information on seminar participants, which means that applications (either those accepted or those rejected) and related materials are unavailable through the NEH. Through other channels, I was able to obtain Lisa Ede's application to Richard Young's 1978-79 seminar, which allows me to make some claims about requirements for applying to an NEH seminar. In addition to writing a brief abstract of the individual study the participant proposed to undertake "over and beyond the work of the seminar," the application includes a brief curriculum vitae; a minimum of at least three references (each of whom had to write a formal letter of recommendation); information about the classes the applicant had taught over the previous two years; the required textbooks, anthologies, and other reading materials used in those classes; and a short description of objectives for participating in the seminar.

<sup>34</sup> NEH guidelines also privileged candidates who had been teaching for several years, and prohibited seminarians from receiving graduate credit for the seminars, or from working at doctoral-granting institutions.

<sup>35</sup> Gibson complicates this point a bit in his final narrative report, when he does not mention community college teachers, instead claiming that he tended to favor "department heads and directors of writing programs hoping to have some impact on other teachers at the home college" (np). Of course, these two criteria are not mutually exclusive, but Gibson does not address the discrepancy.

<sup>36</sup> Rounding out the list of participants, in addition to Vitanza, were Sharon Bassett, James Berlin, Lisa Ede, David Fractenberg, Robert Inkster, Charles Kneupper, Victoria (Winkler) Mikelonis, William Nelson, Victor Vitanza, and Samuel Watson (*Almagno* 3-4).

<sup>37</sup> In addition to nearly 15 years preparing new college teachers for their classroom work at New York University and the University of Massachusetts, Gibson directed NYU's 1962 College Entrance Examination Board's Summer Institute, as well as its NDEA Summer Institute in 1965 ("Writing and Reading in the First College Years" Seminar Description, Walker Gibson papers).

<sup>38</sup> Though Gibson's proposal titles his seminar "Reading and Writing in the First College Years," the official title was subsequently shortened to "Writing in the First College Years." I have not been able to locate any information regarding the name change.

<sup>39</sup> According to *Almagno* and Hawk, Young's 1978-79 seminar was titled "Rhetorical Invention and the Composing Process," a fact supported by the coversheet to Young's NEH proposal. In the *NEH's 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Report*, however, the seminar is listed under the title: "Modern Developments in the Art of Invention." Of course, that same report also indicates Young led a summer seminar in music at Carnegie-Mellon University.

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<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, due to the NEH's policy of destroying records after 25 years, Young's proposal for that first, year-long seminar is no longer available. However, Almagno does include a facsimile of his coversheet as an appendix in her dissertation.

#### Notes to Chapter 4

<sup>41</sup> The first BAWP summer institute excluded elementary teachers, which Gray later acknowledged as a major mistake: "We were so focused on the secondary-only NDEA model and on our goal to establish a project that would improve the writing levels of high school graduates that we didn't even consider the idea of a kindergarten through university mix. We should have known better. The need to attend to writing crosses all grade levels. Therefore, the work of all writing teachers on the kindergarten through university continuum is equally important to all other writing teachers. By the second institute, we had corrected our error and included teachers at all grade levels. We understood that teachers are naturally curious about the learning in other classrooms and at other grade levels, and yet they seldom have the chance to find out what's really going on in any classroom other than their own" (55).

<sup>42</sup> Ironically, the writing component of the summer institute is one Gray says he initially did not recognize the central importance of until BAWP started getting feedback from the teachers rating their own experience with writing as the most important part of their work. According to Gray's memoir, the basis for the writing component was an offhand comment someone made during one of the initial planning sessions: "we ought to have them write" (48).

<sup>43</sup> I have no way to ascertain the veracity of Gray's claims about professional development workshops of the 1960s and '70s, but his description certainly holds true for some of the large scale efforts of the period, such as the NDEA Institutes (see Gray for a detailed description of one such institute) and even, to some extent, the NEH Summer Seminars (those designed for high school teachers).

<sup>44</sup> Speich's "new believer" remains anonymous in his article, but in his memoir, Gray attributes the same tongue-in-cheek quote to Ev Jones, chairman of the UCLA Subject A department (114).

<sup>45</sup> See also Belkin, Foster, Hager, Maeroff, and Rafferty.

<sup>46</sup> The NEH was not the only source of financial support for the writing project. Other foundations such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Wallace Foundation also provided ongoing support during the early years of the NWP ("Commitment and Competence" 189; Washington, telephone interview).

<sup>47</sup> See Lieberman and Wood; Lieberman and Friedrich; and Perrillo for extended discussions of various ways that NWP teachers work to engage multiple publics in nuanced thinking about literacy education.

<sup>48</sup> The remaining fifty percent came from matching local funds from universities, states, K-12 school districts, private foundations and other sponsors

#### Notes to Chapter 5

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, a 2011 thread on the WPA-L listserv about "Communicating with Publics."

<sup>50</sup> Professor X, who claims to teach composition at a "college of last resort" provoked a great deal of discussion within the field for "his" 2008 article published in *The Atlantic*. Publicly indicting higher education for promoting the idea that college is for everyone by admitting adult or nontraditional students who are ill-prepared to succeed, Professor X claims that "[r]emarkably few of my students can do well in these [first-year composition] classes. Students routinely fail;

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some fail multiple times, and some will never pass, because they cannot write a coherent sentence” (70).

<sup>51</sup> Not incidentally, Project English’s collaboration with K-12 teachers served as an important antecedent for the NWP, even if only as an example for Gray of how not to organize professional development for teachers (Project English’s collaboration was still quite hierarchical in nature).

<sup>52</sup> The conservative conceptions of writing and writing instruction evidenced in the Spellings report are echoed in educational discourse stemming from a variety of policy centers and think tanks. For example, the John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy, a conservative non-profit institution in North Carolina, funded Nan Miller’s 2006 whitepaper, “English 101: Prologue to Literacy or Postmodern Moonshine?” Miller attacks what she sees as composition’s postmodern orientation, arguing that the “theory wars” have ended in a rout, silencing any voices daring to speak against composition’s postmodern allegiance. She contends that first-year composition, as it is now shaped, is founded upon six fallacies of composition theory. Numbered among those fallacies is the idea that if composition theorists talk about writing in the language they themselves have invented, no one will notice that their mission in English 101 has more to do with promoting theorist ideology than it does with promoting literacy (this concern, as we saw earlier, was central to Brodkey’s “Troubles in Texas”). Miller also critiques the idea that: 1) the purpose of English 101 is “to empower writers to membership in various discourse communities”; 2) the best way to ensure quality instruction in English 101 is to hire instructors who are trained in composition theory; 3) “the use of isolated grammar and usage exercises not supported by theory and research is a deterrent to the improvement of students’ speaking and writing”; 4) a “student-centered” class provides the best format for “the making of knowledge”; and 5) “Freshman Composition: No Place for Literature” (original quotation marks). Not only does Miller rehearse the “back to basics” call for instruction in grammar and usage, but she also repeats the cycle of blame we have seen in earlier discussions of literacy crises, wherein teachers are blamed for the decline of writing instruction in the nation’s schools.

<sup>53</sup> I will not detail the rhetorics of accountability prevalent in the Spellings Commission’s report, but one need only recall Spellings’ No Child Left Behind legislation to have a general sense of what they entail.



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